

INTERREGNUM APA

#40



BETWEEN THE TWILIGHT AND TOMORROW!

INTERREGNUM



#40

An Amateur Press Association
exploring the worlds of
Roleplaying, Fantasy, and Science Fiction

Kiralee McCauley, Editor

Joseph Teller, Assistant Editor & Art Director

Topics: **When Styles Clash**

What Breaks the Suspension of Disbelief?

Interregnum is an APA comprised of zines written by individual contributors and sent to the editor. It is collated and published eight times a year.

New contributors and subscribers are always welcome. Just mail a check or money order, in US funds, payable to Kiralee McCauley at the address below.

Kiralee McCauley
266 Western Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139

Phone #: (617) 354-3623
Email: ireditor@mindspring.com

A subscription is \$3.00 an issue, plus postage. Interregnum is an amateur production, so contributors must help cover printing costs. Rates are \$2.00 a single-sided master page. Or send 65 double-sided copies of your zine.

All zines sent in for publication in Interregnum should be copyrighted by the author. Copyright may be asserted by using one of these phrases:

Copyright <Date> <Your Name>
© <Date> <Your Name>

If you stipulate terms for fair use, please include "Kiralee McCauley has permission to copy this material free of charge for the Interregnum APA."

Interregnum includes discussion of many trademarked products. No challenge to the holders of these trademarks is intended.

Opinions expressed in individual zines are not necessarily those of the editor.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

(In collation order)

<u>Title</u>	<u>Author</u>	<u># Of Pages</u>
Editorial Pages	Joseph Teller	2
<u>Flutterblast</u> #1	Jim Vassilakos ...	6
<u>Zine Without A Name</u> #1	Peter Maranci ...	4
<u>The Swashbuckling Mage</u> #11 ..	Joseph Teller	8
<u>Refugee</u>	George Phillies. ...	10
<u>True Magick</u> #19	Michael A. Lavoie .	7
<u>Do You Know What Time It Is?</u> .	Mark Kibbe.	1
<u>The Real McCoy</u>	Elizabeth McCoy ..	16
<u>Words On The Wing</u> #11	Cynthia Shettle	14

PUBLICATION SCHEDULE

⇒ The Deadline for inclusion in Interregnum #41 is Aug 15th. The topics are **What Is A Hero?** and **When the Players Go Off the Map**. Interregnum #41 will be mailed around September 1st.

⇒ The Deadline for inclusion in Interregnum #42 is October 1st. The topics are **How to reward Experience & Good Roleplaying** and **Fictional Worlds That Don't Work as Roleplaying Games**. Interregnum #42 will be mailed around October 15th.

INTERREGNUM INFORMATION SHEET

Interregnum is published 8 times a year, in 8½ "x 11" format on paper and on CD-R in PDF format for Windows 95/98, and is partially subsidized by the authors and contributors. Subscribers pay current \$3 an issue plus postage, Contributors do not pay for issues their material appears in except for postage. Contributors do pay \$2 a page for their work to be printed and included with an issue (if the contributors print their own material and mail it to us to include they pay only the postage to receive their issue). Prices are subject to change if our costs increase. Sample issues are available for \$4 for non-subscribers. Specify paper or CD-R format for all orders. IR is a not-for-profit publication.

Content in IR is totally the legal responsibility of the individual zine authors. Authors retain all copyrights to their materials, except that they give the editor the right to reproduce the material in the APA, on the IR website and in any future archive or anthology of IR related articles and content for promotional purposes of the APA. Trademarked and Copyrighted materials are often discussed in IR, but these are not intended to be challenges to the rights of the owners of said Trademarks and Copyrights

The Focus of IR is to present ideas, reviews, articles, cartoons, artwork, fiction, mechanics and discussions about the related areas of interest in Science Fiction, Fantasy, Roleplaying, Goth, Anime, Horror and Pulp Action Adventure Media. Writers, Game Designers, Game Managers, Game Players, Readers and Artists share all these things in the pages of IR with an emphasis on civility, friendship and constructive criticism and discussion. The editor reserves the right to refuse to print or distribute anything that is threatening, aggressively insulting, or violently rude to other contributors or which may cause problems for us legally by mailing it across state lines and overseas.

Zines is the term used to refer to an individual contributor's content. Zines may be sent as a pre-printed master or as a contributor pre-printed set of copies (Copy count is 60, but that is subject to change). Zines masters should be single sided for ease of reproduction. All zines should use 1" margins to allow easy binding. Fonts used should be generally not smaller than 10 point in size to facilitate easy reading clarity and some level of consistent appearance. If you include artwork as part of your zine, be sure that it is public domain, that you are the artist or that you have permission by the artist to use the material in this manner. Maximum pages in a zine allowed is 20 pages. If more than 125 pages of material are received for an issue, extra zines will be held over for the next issue.

Electronic Submissions are possible via the Internet or on floppy disk and we will then print a master on one of our two printers (Both 600 DPI). If you are using a non-standard font, include it the first time you use it so that we can be sure that it will print properly. Submissions over the net should be sent as Attachments, not inclusions, in email (feel free to ZIP them if you wish). We can handle ASCII, HTML, PDF, WordPerfect up to v.9, MS-Word up to v.97, and Lotus Word Pro-96). If you leave space in your zine unfilled, unless you ask otherwise, it will be assumed that you want the art editor to add in some nifty graphics to improve the look of your zine if possible (this is done automatically for all ASCII submitted copies since we will handle the layout). We like IR to look nice for the readers and reviewers. The editor will not change your wording, except obvious and blatant spelling errors. All Zines submitted electronically should be sent to: ireditor@mindspring.com

Conventions are encouraged to join our advertising exchange program. We will include flyers for inclusion with IR for upcoming SF/Fantasy & Gaming related conventions at no cost, but the convention promoters must accept a box of our own flyers for IR and distribute them on the freebie handout tables at the convention for us in exchange.

Accounts of subscribers and contributors should be kept positive when possible, as we cannot afford indefinite credit on delinquent accounts. IR operates on a shoestring budget with all-volunteer staff, and needs cash flow to print each issue. If your account is more than \$20 in arrears you will not receive any issues until the account is paid. Accounts should be set up by sending a check to Kiralee McCauley, 266 Western Ave. Cambridge MA 02139 or by sending money from a Paypal.com electronic account to kiralee@mindspring.com (To real name: Kiralee McCauley) from your bank account or credit card directly for ease of use.



The Editor's Soapbox

Our Cover :

This issue's front cover is "*Cat Woman*" copyright by Vanessa Wells.

Vanessa is an art teacher for GCSE in England. Besides her fantasy art, she has an interest in anime. Most notably she is involved in a fanzine for Cyber City Oedo 080. If you are interested in seeing more of her art it can be found on the elfwood webpage, and on her own page at www.geocities.com/Tokyo/Spa/8066. She can be reached by email at snarx@clara.net or by more mundane means at 95 Rosemary Ave., Braintree, Essex, CM7 2TB. Commissions are always welcome.

Printing of the front cover is courtesy of Peter Maranci (previous IR editor and returning contributor). Help Pete Come up with a name for his new zine!

Upcoming Topics:

Following Issue, Topic A: **What is A Hero?** In roleplaying games the PCs are usually expected to be heros of one sort or another. But what makes an action heroic? What distinguishes a hero from the rest of us?

Following Issue, Topic B: **When Players Go Off The Map...** Eventually it happens. The players ignore every plot hook the GM has laid out, and go in a completely unexpected direction. How do you handle this when it happens? If it's happened to you in the past, as player or GM, what were the results.

Following Issue, Topic A: **How to Reward Experience & Good Roleplaying?**

Every GM and gaming group has its preferred methods, its complaints about those that the commercial games use and their own ideas of how to deal with character experience and growth, and rewarding players for roleplaying, clever thinking and being fun to game with. Lets talk about it....

Following Issue, Topic B: **Fictional Worlds That Don't Work as Roleplaying Games**

It made a great book... maybe it made a great movie.... but does it really work as a Roleplaying Game? No... And Why not? What worlds have failed to work well for you, and why.



New Payment Method Available!

Interregnum is now able to accept Paypal.com funds for folks accounts (a feature that a number of folks have asked us about previously). All such funds should be sent in Paypal to kiralee@mindspring.com And you should list her real last name (McCauley) in the reference field. Paypal allows you to make payment direct from credit cards and bank accounts safely and without incurring any fees or charges for anyone involved.

If you don't have a Paypal.com account but are interested in getting one, please use the Logo link (shown here) from the IR web pages, as this will pass along a referral bonus to IR if you do so, and that will go into the IR fund to cover things like printing flyers and sending out promotional materials to conventions and the like.



Assistant Editor At The Helm

Kiralee's work schedule has clobbered her this month, as expected (and she is somehow trying to invent a 26 hour day so she can actually get everything done in July that needs to be done in this month) so its me, Joe Teller, typing away at the helm and trying to keep everything organized. It looked like we were going to be very page/zine short this month until the last minute but now it appears we will have a "normal" sized issue, and will be mailing only 2 days late from the planned schedule. Thanks to everyone who came thru with much needed zines!

Computer Update

Cindy's computer is back online, after being in the shop for over a month at the local CompUSA while they waited for a new CD-R drive. It was a very frustrating experience, as they should have simply had us keep the machine and called us when it came in, instead of tying up the machine for a full month. I have no interest in doing business with them again for equipment if avoidable.

We are still waiting for the much-promised Mac for Kiralee (which she was first promised back in January from a friend to replace her now very dead PC), so most of the work for IR is still being performed on my HP Pavilion (Originally bought to replace a dead laptop and never meant to be a workhorse, since it has a small hard drive and only 64MB RAM and a very small monitor). Its under the process of being updated (new hard drive added, PC emulation software added, etc.) but has run into some software bugs that are making it unable to communicate with its printer etc. Hopefully this will clear up and it will join the IR workforce by September.

Cover Art Needed!

IR needs some Cover Art - COLOR Cover Art - for future issues. Brave souls should email me their efforts : joeteller@mindspring.com With an info paragraph about the art if used.



FLUTTERBLAST #1

(Being exactly what it sounds like... something loud & obnoxious but with a faintly gratifying aroma)

Jim Vassilakos (jimmvassila@aol.com) / San Bernardino, California
<http://members.aol.com/jimmvassila>

Hi everyone. This being my first contribution to Interregnum, a few words of introduction would seem to be in order. Where to begin... hmm... well, in the beginning, the universe was void and without form. Then... oh... what's the matter? Is that starting too far back? Sheesh... okay, okay... if you want to know my life-story, go read my bio in *Alarums & Excursions* #297 (and if you don't already know about A&E, pull your head out of the sand and go visit <http://www.morat.demon.co.uk/AandE.html>).

The short of it is that I began playing AD&D during the late 70s, probably like

most of you, and also like you, I kept with it for these twenty-odd years (if only I could have taken up something calm and sobering like... say... stamp collecting). With what was apparently way too much free time on my hands, I organized a gamers guild in college (at the University of California, Riverside), and in between my MBA classes, I started a fanzine which, during its brief run of six issues (1990-92) was known appropriately enough as *The Guildsman*. It was, to the best of my knowledge, the first rpg magazine on the Internet (then available in LaTeX and postscript formats). I'm currently working on

putting it into something more accessible to the modern computer user so that the magazine can be rebooted and perhaps live once more. Of course, this promises to be an extensive project, so don't hold your breath.

For the past several years, I've been working on a variety of RPG-related programs for the IBM-PC, all of which work in MS-DOS (and most of which should work just fine under Windows). These are available from my homepage (<http://members.aol.com/jimmvassila>).

Here's a list of the programs along with a brief explanation as to what they do.

Characters & Combat

PROGRAM NAME: "ATTACK" [v1.0] {December 1995}

GAME SYSTEM: AD&D (v1)

FUNCTION: Monster Attack Combat Aid

SIZE: 163,304 bytes zipped

COMMENTS: You enter the armor ratings of the characters and the to-hit and damage/attack stats for the monsters. The program rolls the monster attacks at the press of a button. Guaranteed to speed-up combats. Zipfile includes MEG (v3.03) as well as some Unix utilities (vi, less, ls) which the program makes use of. Note that the AD&D Campaign Archive (see below), contains an updated version of this program.

PROGRAM NAME: "MEG" [v3.03] {December 1995}

GAME SYSTEM: AD&D (v1)

FUNCTION: Monster Encounter Generator

COMMENTS: You pick a monster from a list. The program responds which information about the encounter: AC, THACO, D/A, hitpoints per creature appearing, experience value, and treasure. You can add your own monsters to the program's datafile with relative ease (assuming you know how to use a text editor). Note that the AD&D Campaign Archive (see below), contains an updated version of this program.



PROGRAM NAME: "BAND" [v1.0] {August 1992}

GAME SYSTEM: AD&D (v1, variant)

FUNCTION: NPC Band Generator

SIZE: 41,419 bytes zipped

COMMENTS: Generates a band of non-player characters such that each one fits on one eighty-column line. Details class, level, weapon, armor, weapon proficiencies, damage per attack, hitpoints, THACO, armor class, and exceptional ability scores. Adheres to some variant (homebrew) rules. Many of the program's assumptions easily modified with QuickBasic. Note, this program requires the specification of options at a DOS command prompt. If you are one of those people who are helpless in DOS, you will probably have trouble using this program.

PROGRAM NAME: "TSSI" [v1.0] {October 1992}

GAME SYSTEM: Top Secret/S.I.

FUNCTION: Character Generation Aid

SIZE: 60,413 bytes zipped

COMMENTS: Aids the user in attribute determination, career choice, and skill selection. Performs the tedious chores to ensure character legality, and saves complete attribute and skill charts to a text file. The data file, containing all skills in the Player's Guide and Commando, is easily modified.

PROGRAM NAME: "PARTY" [v1.0] {April 1993}

GAME SYSTEM: AD&D (v1, variant)

FUNCTION: NPC Party Generator

SIZE: 47,340 bytes zipped

COMMENTS: Generates a party of non-player characters such that several fit to a page. Details class, level, weapons, armor, weapon proficiencies, damage per attack, hitpoints, THACO, armor class, ability scores, thief abilities (if any), secondary skill, personality trait/tag, physical description, gold, and experience points. Adheres to some variant (homebrew) rules. Note, like "Band", this program requires the specification of options at the DOS command prompt, so you need to be somewhat proficient with DOS or you'll have a hard time figuring things out.

Text Archives

PROGRAM NAME: "CAMP" [v0.3] {June 1998}

FUNCTION: AD&D Campaign Archive
 SIZE: 966,597 bytes zipped
 COMMENTS: Rule modifications for character generation, combat, and magic, as well as notes on a new campaign setting. Includes various programs to help run RPG sessions including updated version of Attack & Meg.

PROGRAM NAME: "DEBATE" [v0.8] {January 1998}
 FUNCTION: RPG Intellectual Property Debate Archive
 SIZE: 558,765 bytes zipped
 COMMENTS: Unfinished compilation of documents concerning the rights of roleplayers to distribute fan-authored, AD&D-related and Traveller-related works free of charge.

PROGRAM NAME: "Electric Guildsman #1" [preliminary version]
 FUNCTION: Roleplaying Magazine
 SIZE: 386,491 bytes zipped
 COMMENTS: This is basically a vanilla-text archive of several articles from Guildsmans 1-6, along w/ a freeware menuing system called EG (see below).

PROGRAM NAME: "TREK" [v80] {June 1998}
 FUNCTION: Star Trek PBem Archive (Up to Turn #80)
 SIZE: 1.4 megabytes zipped
 COMMENTS: Unfinished write-up of the Star Trek "Forbidden Years" Play-by-Email campaign. Rated "R" for adult language & content.

Mapping

PROGRAM NAME: "WORLDMAP" [v1.0] {January 1996}
 FUNCTION: Mapping Worlds, Cities, Castles, Dungeons, and Starships for RPG settings & scenarios
 SIZE: 732,031 bytes zipped
 COMMENTS: Create maps so you can share your worlds/dungeons/etc with the rest of us on the Net. Comes complete with five example maps along with some attached text including a short adventure.

PROGRAM NAME: "MAPPER" [v0.7] {June 1999}
 FUNCTION: World Mapper
 SIZE: 516,468 bytes zipped
 COMMENTS: Create maps with hexagonal color-tiles so you can share your RPG campaign world with the rest of us on the Net. May attach campaign notes to the map via an easy-to-learn menuing system. Some unfinished sample worlds already included.

PROGRAM NAME: "GALACTIC" [v2.4] {July 1997}

Two important notes about these programs:

1) Many of them are archived as extended directory trees, so in order to dearchive them successfully, you may need to inform your unzip software that you want the directory structure of the program archive preserved. To do this using the DOS version of pkunzip, you need to use the -d flag (pkunzip -d program.zip). To do this using WinZip, you may need to click on Actions/Extract AAB Proceedings: got 'em all
 Abyss: 1-8, 13, 35, 52+
 Acolyte: any
 Adjutant: any
 Adventure Gaming: 14+



2) All of these programs include the source code (most of it in QuickBasic 4.5), and most of them are entirely public domain, open-source freeware. In short, you can use 'em, abuse 'em... you can slam 'em against the wall. I don't care what you do, just so long as you get that last damn drop to fall. Drop of data, that is...

Adventurer: 12+
 Adventurers Club: got 'em all
 Adventures Unlimited: 7+



GAME SYSTEM: Traveller/MegaTraveller/TNE
 FUNCTION: Sector Viewer/Generator
 SIZE: 6,309,999 Bytes
 COMMENTS: Allows user to randomly generate sectors, displays the maps in VGA, translates the UWP code to English, and keeps campaign notes in text files which can be accessed directly from the map. The maps all mesh seamlessly. Includes lots of official and non-official sectors. Even includes world mapping and star system mapping software.

PROGRAM NAME: "STARMAP" [v1.0] {February 1998}
 FUNCTION: 3d Starmapper
 SIZE: 1,815,334 bytes zipped
 COMMENTS: Create and explore three-dimensional starmaps for your science-fiction RPG campaign, then share your work with the rest of us on the Net. May attach campaign notes to the maps via an easy-to-learn menuing system. Sample map included along with SF-RPG discussion archives.

Extras

PROGRAM NAME: "LANG" [v1.0] {December 1997}
 FUNCTION: Language Learner (Greek Version)
 SIZE: 66,368 bytes zipped
 COMMENTS: Learn greek at your own pace via this flashcard program. You enter the words you want to learn (up to 500), then quiz yourself with both recall and recognition tests. Includes an uncompiled font editor to facilitate with the creation of other language files.

PROGRAM NAME: "EG" [v2.0] {January 1996}
 FUNCTION: Electric Guildsman Menuing System For Electronic Book Publishing
 SIZE: 146,035 bytes zipped
 COMMENTS: You create menus and reference text files within them. Your readers will no longer have to wade through tons of material to find what they are looking for. Easy way to make your online works more digestible. Note, if you want to use this program, it is highly recommended that you know your way around DOS.

PROGRAM NAME: "CAL" [v1.3] {June 1999}
 FUNCTION: RPG Calendar
 SIZE: 391,325 bytes zipped
 COMMENTS: Create a calendar for your rpg world, and use it as a campaign log to keep track of what's been going on in the game. Comes with over a dozen different calendars for various well-known rpg settings.

As if all this wasn't enough, I'm also hard at work on a new program. It's going to be an rpg magazine index program, and if you'd be willing to lend a hand, this here is an official call for magazines & fanzines. Feel free to loot the back of your closet, or that smelly box in the garage, and send me what you can. Here's the RPG-related magazines on my current want-list:

Alarums & Excursions: 2-17,
 19-34, 36-51, 53-72, 74, 76-79, 85,
 90-96, 99-102, 117-118, 145,
 149-152, 154-156, 181-185,
 188-190, 195-196, 199, 204-205
 Alien Realms: 4+
 Alien Star: 9+

All of the Above: 0, 2+
 Ann Arbor Wargamer: 1-7, 12+
 Apprentice: 2+
 Arcane: 21+
 Arduin Grimoire: got 'em all
 Ares: 7, 11, 18+
 Armadillo Droppings: 1-25, 27+

Australian Realms: 1-19, 23+
 Autoduel Quarterly: v1n2-v2n4,
 v4n2, v5n2, v7n1
 Awakcning: 1-2, 4+
 BattleTechnology: 22+
 Beaumains: 1-4, 7+
 Beholder: any
 Between Worlds: 7+
 Breakout: 1-22, 28, 30-32, 35+
 Captain's Log: 4-7, 17+
 Camel: 1-3, 4, 6-7, 9, 11+
 Challenge: got 'em all
 Codex: v1n1, v1n4+
 Concepts: 1, 4+
 Crypt of Cthulhu: 1-87, 90+
 Cryptych: v1n3, v1n6, v2n3+
 Cthulhupalooza: 1, 3+
 d8 magazine: 2, 4+
 Dagon: 1-13, 26
 Dark Star: v1n2+
 Deaths Dance Taken Slowly: any
 Different Worlds: got 'em all
 Dragon: got 'em all
 Dragonlords: any
 Drunk & Disorderly: 1-27, 32+
 Dungeon: 3
 Dungeoneer: 7
 Dungeoneer Journal: got 'em all
 Dungeonier Digest: 1, 4+
 Earthdawn Journal: 3-6
 EdgeWork: got 'em all
 Elsewhere: 1, 5+
 Enclosure: any
 Encounters: 2+
 Encyclopedia Hamica: 11, 14
 Familiar: v1n1
 Fantasy Chronicles: 3+
 Fantasy Gamer: got 'em all
 Far & Away: 1, 3+
 Far Traveller: got 'em all
 First Encounter: 1-2, 8+
 Fractal Spectrum: 1-10, 15, 20+
 Future Roleplayer: 3+
 Future Wars: 1-32, 34-37, 40+
 Game News: 9, 13+
 Game Oracle: 1-2, 11+
 Gameplay: 2-3, 5-6, 9, 14+

Gamer's Forum: 1-4, 7+
 Gamer: got 'em all
 Gamers Connection: 1-11, 13-14,
 17+
 Gamesman: 1-6, 8+
 GamesMaster International: 1, 7,
 9-10, 14, 16+
 Game Trade: got 'em all
 Garemag: 1-2, 4+
 Gateways: 1, 15+
 GM Magazine: v1n03, v1n06,
 v1n08, v2n08+
 Good Games Guide: 2+
 Green Goblin: 1-13, 17, 19, 23,
 25+
 Green Mountain Gamer: 1-4, 6+
 Grey Worlds: 4+
 Griffen: any (a.k.a. Silver
 Griffen?)
 Gryphon: got 'em all
 Guardsman: 1-4, 6+
 Guildsman: got 'em all
 Hamlore: any
 Havoc: 1+
 Heroes: got 'em all
 High Passage: got 'em all
 Horror Gamer: 2+
 Hungry Maggot: 1, 3+
 Idolum Quarterly: 4+
 Imagine: 16-17, 24, 31+
 Imazine: 1-20
 Imperial Lines: got 'em all
 Imperial News Service: 3+
 Imperium Staple: got 'em all
 Inferno: 1-3, 5-9, 13+
 Infiniverse: v1n01-v1n02,
 v1n06-v1n14, v1n16+
 Interactive Fantasy: 1 (a.k.a.
 Inter*action)
 Interface: v2n3+
 Interplay: 2-4, 7, 9+
 Interregnum: 21, 25, 29-33, 35
 Ivory, Peacocks & Apes: 2+
 Jour. Senseless Carnage: 1-8, 10+
 Jour. Travellers Aid Society: got
 'em all
 Journeys: got 'em all

Judges Guild Journal: got 'em all
 Jumpspace/Voyages: 12, 14, 16+
 Kfan Uzargou: any
 Last Province: 6+
 Little Wars: any
 Maelstrom: 1-2, 4+
 Mars: 3, 5+
 Masters of Role Playing: 4-5, 9+
 Mega-Mag: 0, 9+
 MegaTraveller Journal: got 'em all
 Morningstar Rising: 7+
 Multiverse: 1, 3+
 Mythic Masters: got 'em all
 Mythic Perspectives: 9+
 News from Bree: any
 Nexus: got 'em all
 NorthCoast RolePlaying: 10+
 Nuts & Bolts: 1-11, 14+
 Olympus: 2+
 Opifex: got 'em all
 Other Hands: got 'em all
 Owl & Weasel: any
 Pegasus: 13
 Polaris: 2+
 Polyhedron: 128, 133
 Pyramid: got 'em all
 Quasits & Quasars: 1-8, 10+
 Re:Quests!: 1-24, 26+
 Red Giant: 1, 3+
 Rifter: any
 Rolepaper: got 'em all
 Roleplayer: 1-4, 6, 8-10
 Role Player Independent:
 v1n04-v1n05, v1n07-v1n08,
 v1n10, v2n05+
 RQ Adventures: any
 Scroll: 2, 4-5, 13+
 Seal of the Imperium: v1n2+
 Security Leak: 1-3, 6+
 Serendipity's Circle: got 'em all
 Shadis: 54+
 Shadowland: 2
 Signal-GK: 14+
 Silver, Swords & Slaughter: 6+
 Sorcerer's Apprentice: 6, 18+
 Sound & Fury: any
 Space/Fantasy Gamer: 9-76, 86+

Space Gamer: 1
 Spell Book: 1-12/84, 32/85+
 Starburst: any (traveller zine)
 Stardate: got 'em all
 StarDrive: v1n2+
 Starry Wisdom: 4+
 Starships, Starports & Veh.: got
 'em all
 Star Trek Magazine: got 'em all
 Star Wars Journal: v1n16+
 Strategic Review: v1n1-v2n1
 Stroke & Dagger: 2, 5+
 Supernova: 1-25, 27+
 Tales of the Reaching Moon: 1-9,
 19+
 Tech Factory: 1-11, 14+
 Terra Traveller Times: 28-30, 32+
 Third Imperium: any
 Tiffany Star: 9-11, 14-21, 27, 29+
 Timeout: 6+
 Tradetalk: 1, 6+
 Traveller Chronicle: 1-3
 Traveller Digest: 1-4
 Troll: got 'em all
 Trollcrusher: any
 Unspeakable Oath: 16+
 Valkyrie: got 'em all
 Variant: any
 VIP of Gaming: 6+
 Virtual Lore: 4+
 Vision: 3+
 Visions: got 'em all
 Vortex: 7
 Wargaming: 1-3, 5+
 Warlock: 4, 6-8, 10, 13+
 Warpstone: 1-2, 4-6, 8
 Whisperer: 3+
 White Dwarf: 3-7, 9-10, 205, 243,
 246+
 White Knight: 1-9, 11-13, 15+
 White Wolf/Inphobia: 1-3
 Wild Hunt: 47, 54, 65, 69, 97, 104,
 125, 130, 143, 163, 165, 167, 188+
 Working Passage: got 'em all
 World Builder: 1-8, 13+
 Wyrms' Footnotes: 1-9, 15+
 Ye Booke of Tentacles: 3+

If you're catching this late, a continually updated version of this list should be available at <http://geocities.yahoo.com/jimvassila/wants.htm>

I hope to release the program as freeware later this year (or perhaps next year depending on how long all of this takes). Hence, this is all going toward the "good of gaming" as it were.

Over 2000 magazine issues have already been indexed into this program's searchable database, and I have a heck of a lot of people to thank for helping me out just in terms of giving, loaning, and selling me their old fanzines. If you don't want to part with any of your old zines, I totally understand. Make me some photocopies, or if you prefer, let me borrow your fanzines so I can make the

photocopies and then send you back the originals. In short, I'm scrambling here, working my scrounge proficiency to the hilt. I just hope the program will be a useful tool for gamers once it's finally ready for release.

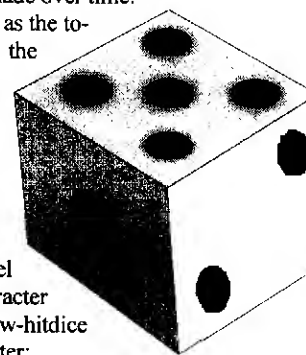
Now onward to the topics for issues #39 (house rules, gathering the PCs) & #40 (when styles clash, suspension of disbelief). I originally intended to have this zine appear in the last issue of Interregnum, but you know how it goes. Oh well... so now I have twice as many topics to yak about.

House Rules

The game I most often run is AD&D, sort of a mish-mash of 1st & 2nd editions

with enough homebrew thrown in that many might not even recognize it as AD&D. I'm going to go over just three of the changes we've made over time:

1) We're using the d30 as the to-hit die, rather than the usual d20. In my opinion, this has vastly improved the game by making combat shorter and more deadly. It used to be almost comical watching the low-level but well-armored character do battle with the low-hitdice but well-armored monster:



<roll> "I missed."

<roll> "The monster misses..."
 <roll> "I miss again."
 <roll> "Monster misses..."
 <roll> "Swoosh."
 <roll> "Swoosh."
 (repeat as desired)

I asked some friends in the SCA how reasonable it would be for two novice warriors decked out in full plate to completely miss each other something like nine times out of ten (which is what the AD&D rules would seem to indicate). My friends laughed. They said that although some of the blows would glance off armor or shield, there would be penetrating blows fairly often (much more often than on 10% of the swings/stabs). The d30 provided for this. No matter how low-level the PCs are, they can hit a reasonable percentage of the time. And no longer can high-level PCs expect to simply wade through a pack of goblins or angry peasants with pitchforks. The d30 is a good equalizer as well as a useful device to make the combats quicker and less boring. If you're interested in trying this but don't know where to find d30s, I am to understand that www.nobleknight.com has a good selection for something like \$1.75 each. Tell Aaron that I sent you.

2) As a gamemaster, I have a general policy of laissez-faire, a term taken from french roughly meaning "let people do whatever the hell they want." It is commonly associated with a policy of minimal government interference in the economy, a hands-off approach where the wheels of capitalism are left to turn largely unattended. I've adapted this philosophy to roleplaying, striving to minimize decisions by gamemaster-whim as much as possible. One of most useful tools toward accomplishing this has been the use of a luck die.

The luck die is essentially a simple d6, 1's and 6's both cascaded for purposes of producing conditions of exceptional luck (good or bad). Anything that I've pre-planned as gamemaster works as I've planned it. Anything that I haven't pre-planned falls under the province of the luck die.

Example: The characters walk into a tavern. "Do I see any elves," asks the elf in the party. "Luck die," I reply. He rolls and comes up with a two. "No, no elves in here. But count your lucky stars... at least nobody's looking for a rope." If he rolled a one, or worse, a one cascaded by

another one, it could have gotten ugly. A six, however, would have indicated a healthy clientele of elves. A double-six might mean he knows one of them... a new NPC has just entered the adventure.

The luck roll is also useful for all those snap rulings that a GM is forced to make, whether it comes to interpreting a poorly worded spell description or deciding whether or not the ground is soft enough to allow a falling character an extended lease on life. Many times, arguments can slow a game down for hours at a time. The luck roll helps to avoid all this. It also helps the players feel like the gamemaster is being fair. And, those rare double sixes or double ones allow for something exciting to happen. Regardless of how well the party plans and plots, there's always a chance of Mr. Murphy (of Murphy's Law fame) dropping in uninvited and ruining their entire day. And the best part of it is that they can't even bitch.

3) The last thing I'm going to tell you about is something I'm sure you've all heard before. I won't go into great detail about it, but like many gamemasters, I've done a complete overhaul of the magic system. This has affected things on many levels, and I'm just going to talk about two of them. The first is mana-acquisition and the second is spell-failure.

One thing that has always bugged me about standard AD&D is that if mages can get to be so powerful, why aren't there more of them? One would think that an enlightened King would attempt to set up a series of academies to churn out mages by the thousands for use in his army. In my mind, there needs to be some economic disincentive... perhaps some arbitrary limit on the total amount of magic available.

Enter the mana-system. In my game, mages (and clerics... all spellcasters operate under the same general system), need mana in order to cast their magic. The most common way to get this mana is to procure it in crystal form. The crystals are small and round, like tiny marbles. Perhaps a hundred can fit into a single vial. The mage must burn these while meditating in order to ingest the mana into his body (you might say that the mana is a sort of drug which fuels the magic). To cast a third level spell requires three points of mana (three crystals). Depending on the type of mana you purchase (they all have different

properties), you may spend anywhere from 20gp to 250gp per crystal. Hence, being a mage is very expensive.

Where does the mana ultimately come from? That's one of the secrets of the campaign and is only known by the most arcane of wizards. Some people say that it is derived from the land itself. Others say that it is procured from the gods and rewarded in return for worship. Still others whisper of ancient artifacts passed down from dead civilizations of eons past, before the age of men when magic was plentiful, and that it is from these incomparably powerful devices that the archmages extract an ever-flowing stream of mana, converting it to crystal form by only the most powerful and mysterious of spells.

Another facet of magic in my campaign is that it is inherently chaotic, and it requires great skill to wield successfully. Regardless of a wizard's learning, however, there are still near limitless ways for Mr. Murphy to make a guest appearance. To quantify this, I use a formula to calculate a mage's spell failure table. Each value is based on the mage's level & degree of specialization, his intelligence and wisdom, the level of the spell, and the type of mana being used to cast the spell in question. Likewise, there are a host of environmental factors to consider, such as whether or not the mage is under the stress of melee combat, and whether or not the mage has been using metal items (which provokes the ire of Qeb, the DemonGod beneath the Mountains and an avowed hater of mages) or animal products (chiefly leather or bone, which can cause interference by attracting dead animal spirits). In short, there are many things a mage has to be aware of when casting spells, and when spells do fail, the results can be anything from humorously benign to horribly catastrophic. Granted, all this makes spellcasting a little more tedious, but the rewards are that truly anything can happen. It puts the wonder and the mystery back into magic, and so in my mind is a rule modification well worth making.

For more on my homebrew rules, please download the AD&D Campaign Archive from my homepage. I use this program on a laptop when I'm GMing and have found it to be an invaluable tool toward speeding up the game and making it more enjoyable for everyone involved.

Gathering the PCs

One book which I find myself constantly using at the beginning of every new AD&D campaign is Central Casting: Heroes of Legend (authored by Paul Jaquays and published by Task Force Games). What this book does is essentially devise a random background history for each character in the group. Not all the results are plausible, but you can re-roll what you don't like or what doesn't make sense or modify it in some way so that it does make sense. In short, the book is a springboard for ideas.

I feel that using it is a useful first step toward bringing the party together because the character histories can usually be intertwined in some way. *"It says here that Alderic has a sister. Hmm... perhaps the sister can be Thalassa, since the two players are boyfriend/girlfriend in real life. That way they'll have an in-character justification for working together, which they're certainly going to do anyway. And it says here that Peregrine ran from battle during his stint in the King's army. Perhaps Thalassa helped him find a place to hide until after the enemy troops had swept through her village looking for men of military age."*

Of course, there are many tried and true ways to bring the party together: a common employer, a common enemy, a howling night at the local tavern. But, in my opinion, none of these are quite as satisfying as a common history, a shared back-story, an in-character friendship which provides all the rationale they need to put up with each other despite their various quirks and differences.

"You sure your character would really back-stab Alderic? Remember, you've known him for over ten years. His sister saved your life. Think about this just a little bit."

"Dah... okay, I guess you're right."

When Styles Clash

When gamers think of styles clashing, most think about roleplaying and characterization versus hack-n-splatter, high-adrenaline combat. Others might point to the differences between low-level, realistic campaigns and high-level, heroic powergames. I don't know if there is any "right" way to play, but there are certainly many different types of

campaigns.

I remember once visiting the gamers guild over at Cal-Tech. As far I could tell, they were all exclusively playing an RPG of in-house design which I believe they called "Warlock". You could see just by looking at a character sheet that the game was descended from AD&D but had evolved to the point of becoming something quite different, much more technical and numbers-oriented. One of the central features was that by general agreement, the campaign world would explode at the end of every year, only to reform at the beginning of the next one. And the goal, as far as I could tell, was to accumulate as many experience points as possible before that looming cataclysmic event.

Players typically rolled with the left hand and typed on their scientific calculators with the right. The GM, as I recall, had two calculators going simultaneously. Meanwhile, "the dwarf" was yelling something about getting out of the way of "T-balls". "T-balls? What are those?" I don't recall his precise answer, but the gist was that it was something like a fireball. I took the opportunity to ask him his character's name. He must have looked at me like I was from another planet. As it turned out, his character didn't have a name. He was simply, "the dwarf."

Fortunately, a friend of mine had come along, and we looked at each other, each trying to figure out if we were the only two sane people there. We finally excused ourselves to peruse the campus commons and piss in the Cal-Tech pond.

I don't think I've ever been so offended by a group of gamers. Actually, it wasn't so much offended as merely mystified... confused... perplexed. However, these things do happen, and clearly, in that particular room, I was in the minority. Different strokes for different folks. I won't be one to judge, but I'll be damned if I'm ever going back.

Suspension of Disbelief

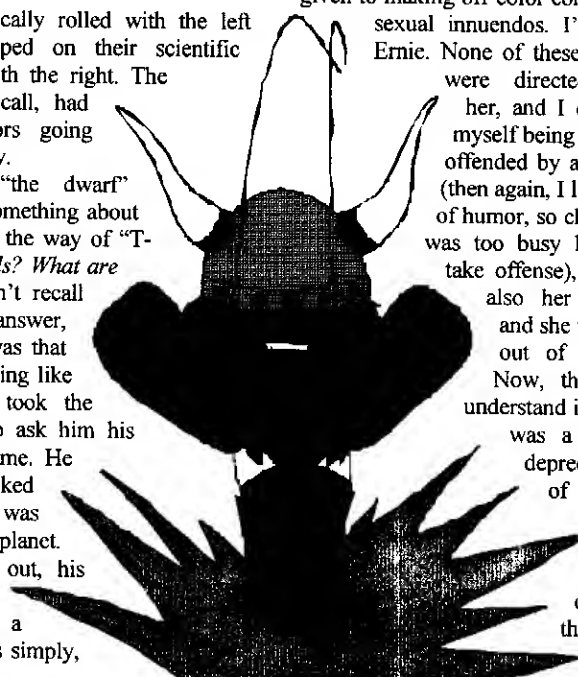
This is a difficult one for me to tackle, perhaps because I've been on both sides of the fence.

About, oh... five or ten years ago, I was running a campaign with a really good group of players. I guess you don't know these people, so there's no need to protect the guilty, but I'll just call one of them Jake. He wasn't generally a problem-player by any stretch of the imagination, however, in this particular game he ended up as one. We had started the campaign (again, your traditional AD&D campaign with all my usual add-ons and doodads) over at his place. He was recently married, and his wife was a player also, but she was getting upset at one of the players in the group who was given to making off-color comments and

sexual innuendos. I'll call him Ernie. None of these comments were directed towards her, and I don't recall myself being particularly offended by any of them (then again, I like that sort of humor, so chances are I was too busy laughing to take offense), but it was also her apartment, and she wanted him out of the group. Now, the thing to understand is that Ernie was a very self-deprecating kind of guy. He would sooner make fun of himself than crack a joke at another

person's expense. But she just didn't like the humor, and Jake cautioned us to tone it down. I think Ernie tried, but it apparently wasn't enough, and pretty soon I got the feeling that we were all walking on eggshells trying to keep this one girl happy (she was the only female in the campaign... I don't know if that had something to do with it or not).

In any case, I talked things over with some of the player who I'd known since early childhood (Jake I'd only known for about five years, Ernie for about one). It was suggested to me by the others that the problem wasn't Ernie but was rather Jake's wife who was either overly sensitive or was making a power-play in her marriage with Jake.



Now, I don't know anything about marriage. I've never been married. I don't want to be married. But I do understand about power-plays and relationships and how if there are two people sitting a room minding their own business, you automatically have politics whether either party wants it or not. As GM, it was my responsibility to make a choice: Jake or Ernie. I didn't want to make that choice, but I was being forced into the situation. Our solution was finally to move the game to the apartment of one of the other players. Ernie, Jake, and Jake's wife were not consulted during all this. We just let them know we'd be moving the game for the reason that it would be a better atmosphere (we'd have an actual gaming table, there would be plenty of space, and there would be a nice, hot jacuzzi outside waiting for us for when we finished... overall it was a much nicer apartment complex).

One of my long-time friends predicted (not unhappily) that we'd lose Jake's wife immediately, that if it wasn't at her place, it wouldn't be worth it to her to bother showing up. He also figured that Jake having to game one night every week without her would put too much strain on their marriage, so that Jake would probably drop out within a month or two at most. Both of these predictions came to pass exactly as foretold.

Here's the interesting part. I had recently read the Elfquest saga (the comicbooks by Wendy & Richard Pini), and I was enchanted by the notion of a Troll Kingdom under the mountains. I put one into the setting of my own game. It had been on the campaign map since we first started, a little scrawl that said "Lair of the TrollKing". As it happened, the players were nearby, and being a powerful party, they wanted to meet this TrollKing and do a little bit of political maneuvering on behalf of one of the human kingdoms.

Jake was suddenly terribly upset by this notion of Trolls being intelligent enough to organize into a kingdom. He thought it ludicrous and against the very premise of AD&D. He was quite vocal about it too, shaking his head and rambling on about how stupid the whole thing was. I have to admit, my feelings were a bit hurt by all this, but I didn't bend to his demands nor did I ask him to leave. I just let him make the entire group miserable for a session or two before he finally left on his own accord.

I've seen him since, but we don't really talk much about gaming anymore, nor about what happened. He made his choices and I made mine. Was it about suspension of disbelief? I really don't think so. If somebody wants to leave a group, and they really think they need an excuse better than "my wife doesn't like me gaming with you guys," they'll find a way to concoct something that they dislike, and they'll usually make sure, at least in their own mind, that full blame rests squarely on the gamemaster. It's rude. It's lame. It happens.

On the flipside, like I said before, I've been in the player's shoes as well. In one campaign, the problem wasn't really the scenario so much as the group itself. I don't think I need to go into detail, but you know what I mean. I'd been invited to this game via somebody I'd met on the Internet, and I'd brought along a friend since they were looking for two additional players, and as it turned out, this group was just weird.

Anyway, the GM said that he'd been working hard on the adventure, and as it turned out, it was a fairly standard treasure hunt involving the buried gold of a dead pirate. We snooped around to find out more about this pirate and somehow acquired a burnt map with a big black "X" marking the spot. There was also an arrow pointing toward the "X" with the words "Thar be Gold."

I wasn't aware that pirates wrote the same way they talked, and my friend and I exchanged glances as though we were both ready to fall from our seats laughing. Again, the scenario wasn't that bad, although it did have a certain "canned" feel about it. As for the map itself, I thought the GM had done a good job. It was even charred around the edges, no doubt some careful work with a gas-burning stove. All in all, I thought the GM had made a decent effort to provide an evening's entertainment, although "Thar be Gold" was a source of some mirth for months to come. We ended up not going back, not because of the game itself so much as the group of weirdos (who may well have thought that we were weird). Also, there was the distance to consider. It took about an hour to get there, so if the game wasn't fantastic, there was no way we'd be sticking around. And finally, there was "Thar be Gold!" which continually kept us in giggles.

Now for the funny part. Around a year later or thereabouts, I was looking

through some TSR product... I think it was called Treasure Maps. Included in the package were several sheets of cardstock paper, on one side a treasure map and on the other side the scenario associated with the map. Well... guess what I found? "Thar be Gold!" There it was, plain as day, complete with the scenario that this GM said he'd worked so hard on. No wonder the damn thing felt like a canned adventure. It was a canned adventure! We didn't leave the game for that reason, but suddenly I felt quite justified in our decision.

Getting back to this notion of "suspension of disbelief", my general feeling is that if the game is good overall (good group, good GM, good interaction), then it doesn't matter terribly much. If the game isn't good overall, however, that's when it comes into play, becoming the excuse that a player will use in order to leave. When does disbelief occur? This is purely up to the individual player. My advice to you gamemasters out there is not to take it personally. It can mean all sorts of things, and many of them have absolutely nothing to do with you. The best you can do is just react to the situation like an adult, hope the friendship continues to last, and wish the person well as they head out the door.

As a postscript, the campaign I was running w/ Jake and the others ran a good while after Jake left. We eventually let it die, however, after one of the players (the one who's apartment we were now meeting at) had to move away to go to law school (man, was he a rules-lawyer... I sure as hell wouldn't want to see him on opposing counsel). It was a good campaign, a lot of good memories. And isn't that what gaming is all about?

July 2000

ZINE WITHOUT A NAME



© July 2000 Peter Maranci

peter@maranci.net

<http://www.maranci.net/rq.htm>

188 Fourth Avenue
Woonsocket RI 02895

So much has happened.

I'm writing this in a hurry, because the deadline is in three days and I want to get this done. So here's some of what's happened since my last zine:

UPDATES

♥ I'm engaged! Her name is Teri. The cats' names are Sam and Baby. The wedding will be on April 21, 2001.

- I've moved. With great sadness, it was necessary to give up the old Malden place. Now I live in Woonsocket, RI. It's a hell of a commute. But it's a *lot* cheaper.

- My job has moved to Quincy, and will move near Fenway in a few months. I'm anticipating a 4 - 5 HOUR daily commute (round-trip). This may not improve my mood. :-)

- I've left TIAC (at last!). They finally got too bad even for me, so now I'm the proud owner of my own domain. My new email address is: **peter@maranci.net**

- My web site has moved—please change your bookmarks! My RQ site is now at <http://www.maranci.net/rq.htm>

- My old web site has changed. If you want a laugh, take a look at <http://www.tiac.net/users/maranci/tiacsux.htm>. The word on Usenet is that TIAC (now a proud member of the world-wide PSINet megacorporation) doesn't bother to delete expired web pages, so this tribute to one of the world's suckiest ISPs may stay up for years (or longer—if it goes down I'll put it up on my own site. Yes, I'm vengeful ☺).

- Surprise: I'm still gaming! I've been driving in to the old game rooms at MIT on Saturdays. It's not very convenient to give

up my Saturdays, but at this point the players' various schedules are so tight that no other day is possible. It's an hour and fifteen minutes drive from Woonsocket to the city (assuming no traffic), and that's just too long a commute to let me game in town on weekdays. Particularly since I have to get up at 6 AM to make it to work on time!

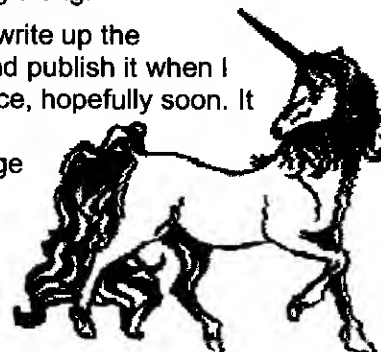
THE NEW MIT SESSIONS

Since I don't have the apartment in Malden to game in, we've been meeting at the old game rooms at MIT on Saturdays—talk about *deja vu*!

The most recent game I ran (it just ended last week) was a scenario that I set in the Call of Cthulhu Dreamlands, although to tell the truth the adventure could easily have fit into any setting (I initially conceived it as a RuneQuest/Glorantha adventure). I think it went quite well, although next time I'll use RQ3 mechanics rather than CoC.

The Dreamlands setting has one HUGE advantage over other settings: every time things bog down in pettifogging detail, I can simply jump ahead to the next moment of interest. Why? As I said time and again during the run, **BECAUSE IT'S A DREAM!** Works like magic, and really keeps the game moving along.

I'm going to write up the adventure and publish it when I get the chance, hopefully soon. It involves an isolated village stalked by mysterious night-time horrors, and an ancient



rivalry.

By the way, MIT hasn't changed too much. Some of the corridors have been re-done, and some of the food machines are missing, but for the most part things are as they were. There are some cool new robotic ice-cream machines, though.

NEAT STUFF

I've found some neat things you might enjoy.

Knights of the Dinner Table. Does everyone know about this fantastic gamer comic? It first came out in the last year that I published IR, I think, but I just re-discovered it. Now there are dozens of full-size issues, and it's a monthly comic book. I've laughed my ass off any number of times while reading it. An instant gaming classic.

Your-Site.com. My new domain hosts. \$89 for a year of hosting, including set-up fee and free domain registration. It comes with 50 MB of storage, 5 POP email boxes, and unlimited domain forwarding. I've set up everyone in my family with their own forwarding addresses, for every possible variant of their names. It's fun! And my hits have gone up quite a bit since I moved. By the way, they're based in Massachusetts and are incredibly responsive. I'm quite pleased.

The Lathe of Heaven! This classic made-for-TV PBS SF classic is FINALLY out on tape, and will be available on DVD within a few months. For twenty years I've been able to consider myself lucky because I had a bootleg of it, but now anyone can buy it. I can still consider myself elite, though; in the new tape the Beatles' version of "With A Little Help From My Friends" has been overdubbed with Joe Cocker's cover. Need I say that the original Beatles version was infinitely better?

You know, I'm sure there's a lot of other neat stuff I've found in the last few years, but I can't remember any of it right now.

CON SURVIVAL 101

I started writing this after the last Arisia. It was originally going to be an introduction to cons for newbies, which is why it's a bit simplistic. Skip down to the first Problem.

Cons 101: How To Survive A Science Fiction Convention

A good science fiction or roleplaying convention can be an incredible experience for a fan. You can pack more fun into three short days than in weeks of more mundane vacationing. If you're at all into science fiction, fantasy, or roleplaying and haven't been to a con, what are you waiting for?

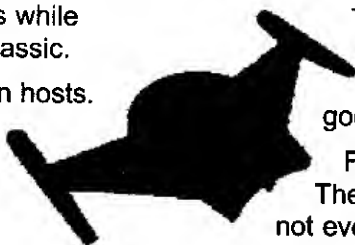
There are a few perils along the way, though. A little careful planning can make a merely good experience great.

First, pick your convention carefully. There are many different sorts, and not every con is right for every person. Some cons are very traditionalist, focussing (for example) on written science fiction only; others are multifaceted, including other types of media, costuming, dance, art, and more. Some cons are run for profit, charging all that the market will bear but offering access to big-name stars; others are run by fans for fans, with less flash but often more genuine fun.

If you're a science fiction, fantasy, or game fan, a genre convention can be a hell of a lot of fun. But there are a few perils along the way that can ruin a great experience. They're easy to forget once the excitement of the con is over, though, so here's a quick list of dangers and solutions.

Problem: Dry Air

Possibly the greatest physical stress of a con is dehydration. There's something about hotel air, particularly in northern climes in winter, that sucks every last bit of moisture from your skin. After a while, even chugging



water doesn't help; it seems to pass straight through your system, leaving your lips, eyes, and throat painfully dry as you jiggle from foot to foot in the line to the bathroom.

Solution: Moisturizers

Bring a one-liter plastic screw-top bottle of water with you, and refill as necessary. Drink like a fish. Retain moisture with various topical products; lip balm (Blistex Herbal works well for me), non-medicated saline nasal spray, skin lotion, and if necessary even eye drops. Tip: plaster lip balm on your lips before you sleep and you'll feel a lot better the next day. It's also not a bad idea to give yourself a steam bath by closing yourself in the bathroom and running the shower on the hottest setting for a few minutes. Then open the door to moisturize your hotel room.

Problem: Infection

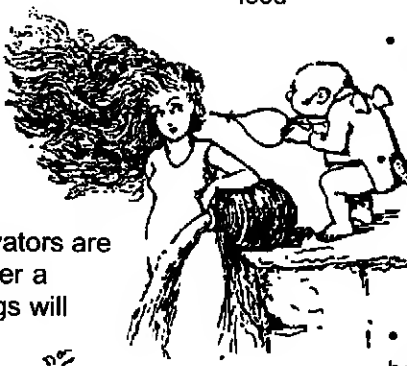
When a lot of people are packed into a restricted space, odds are good that some of them are sick—and in tight quarters, colds or the flu can spread quickly, particularly if your throat is dry and vulnerable.

Solution: Vitamins and Protection

Moisturizing will help you to resist infection. Boost your immune system with multivitamins. Suck on zinc and vitamin C lozenges throughout the day. Wash your hands frequently, and try not to touch your face. Bring a small bottle of sanitizer with you—yes, you'll look like a geek, but at least you won't get sick.

Problem: Body Aches

A con often involves a lot of standing, walking, and stair climbing—particularly if the elevators are packed, as they usually are. After a couple of days your feet and legs will probably start to resent you.



Solution: Sneakers & Tylenol

There's not a lot that you can do about this, but a good pair of sneakers or comfortable shoes with some support can at least alleviate the pain a bit. Make sure to bring your favorite analgesic along. If you can get someone to massage afflicted areas, more power to you—it certainly can't hurt.

Problem: Stench

It's a sad fact that there are some people who don't understand that it's a good idea to keep fairly clean. For some reason, this attitude seems to be more common among fen. Being jammed in a crowded hallway or elevator with a bunch of sweaty fen can be a truly nauseating experience.

Solution: Um, not much

Avoid contributing to the problem: bring deodorants, and don't skip showering! A possible defense would be to carry a perfume-soaked handkerchief, which would fit right in as part of a decadent 30th-century aristocrat costume. Finally, Pepto-Bismol and antacids can be a final defense against a turned stomach.

Other Needs:

- **Crisp one-dollar bills** for the junk food & soda machines
- **Change** for when the dollar bill changers in the machines break
- **Pepto-Bismol & antacid** after too much junk food
- **Condoms** for those who don't waste time on junk food ☺
- **Comfortable shoes** because face it, the elevators are always gonna be full
- **Ear plugs & a mask** if you're sharing a hotel room with someone who snores
- **Soda and junk food in bulk** because \$1 is too much for a 20-oz bottle or microscopic bag of chips

HAVE FUN!

MISCELLANEOUS

I haven't had a chance to do any comments—although given the reduced number of contributors, commenting shouldn't be as arduous as it used to be. I'll try to do comments in my next zine.



A while ago I had a lot of fun playing a character named Timmy in Joe's game. He was a lot of fun—I found myself really getting into him, one of those unfortunately rare situations where you surprise yourself with the level of your own roleplaying (I hope I'm not sounding too swelled in the head, Joe, Kiralee, and Cindy!).

The campaign was set in a near-future alternate Earth with magic as well as technology. Timmy was 16 and had spent his entire life in a completely sealed research facility, speaking only to fellow experiments, technicians, and doctors. And then one day he found himself on his own, standing next to the smoking ruins of the laboratory in the woods.

Through a chain of events he met the rest of the party, but he has curious gaps in his understanding of the world. He calls almost everyone "doctor", for example. Almost everything in the world is a new experience for him, and therefore a source of endless fascination. He doesn't know if animals are intelligent or not, since some of the animals in the video games he played as a child certainly seemed to be. He has no idea of what is or is not possible for him to do, and so anytime he sees anyone do anything interesting his first question is "Can I do that?". And then he tries. Oddly enough, he sometime succeeds.

For example, he met a sinister and mysterious stranger who often pulled black roses out of the air and gave them to women. "Can I do that?" said Timmy, and before anyone could tell him he couldn't, he had—except that his rose was chocolate. Magical research indicated some very weird

stuff about Timmy, but since I'm not sure what Joe's plans are for the setting and campaign, I'll hold off writing about them.

I wish I could play Timmy again, but it's just so hard to work out schedules!

BLAST FROM THE PAST

One bit of content I've started putting up on my RQ site are my old Rack & Rune zines in Acrobat format, with modern annotations. Unfortunately I'm missing a whole chunk of them. Disks and hard copies are probably in storage, so perhaps I'll be able to dig them out in a month or so, when Teri and I move into a larger apartment on the first floor of our house.

At this point I suspect I'll have to scan at least some of the issues, which means I'll have to buy a scanner; fortunately they're cheap.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Who knows? It shouldn't take as long as next time, anyway.



Neat art, huh? I found this at http://www2.lysator.liu.se/sf_archive/sf-texts/clipart/

2 COLOPHON 3

Still using Publish-It 4.0 for Windows—go figure! But you should see how much better my system is since last time. Printed in Acrobat 4.0. How times have changed!

—>Peter

THE SWASHBUCKLING MAGE RIDES AGAIN #11

*"When Muses talk we listen...
even at 3 AM on a Tuesday."*

Copyright ©2000 By Joseph W. Teller
Email: joeteller@mindspring.com
Website: www.fantasylibrary.com



Personal Notes:

I'm starting writing early this issue, to ensure I get everything I want into it. I'm running around with a lot more to do than normal both at home and working on IR, as Kiralee has received a promotion at work and is now doing her bosses work as well as her own (her boss is away on maternity leave) which means that she is putting in regular overtime and coming home tired a lot of the time. Its unknown if she'll even have a zine this issue, and I've taken over the helm temporarily in regards to the basic editor duties (on top of my normal duties as the assistant editor and art director).

Adding a second gaming night to our schedule is working well so far, with Ian taking the helm on Wed. and running an alternative reality Elizabethan England GURPS game. I'm having fun playing a Polish Calvary Officer (ex-communicated and thus forced to leave Poland) who became a highwayman in the Basque country and then after making a small fortune fled to England, where he's currently Coachman and bodyguard to Lady Elizabeth while she's waiting for her sister to die and give her the throne. We're slowly getting the other characters together, forming the earliest version of "Her Majesty's Secret Service".

Hera and Zeus (Game Review):

Created by Richard Borg, and published by Rio Grande Games (www.riograndegames.com), but made in Germany. ISBN 1-892081-57-1. Retail price approx. \$19.95 retail price.

This boxed card game is based in Greek Mythology and the frequent divine feuding between the gods of Hera and Zeus in the myths, as they flex their will upon the world's mortal and immortal beings to decide the feuds.

One player takes the part of Hera and one takes the part of Zeus within the game, each with their own deck of 43 cards and a small divine "marker" that represents the deity when they at last personally come down to join the fray.

The cards in each deck are beautiful representations of a wide range of mythological monsters, heroes, gods and beings. The two decks are very similar (except that they have different colored backs, and that one deck has heroes and the other has cards for Amazons. There was a slight printing error with our set : the Hera marker is purple, the Zeus marker green and the associated deck is supposed to be the same color as the marker, but the cards were printed in the opposite

colors (which confused us for a minute or so until we figured it out).

Cards are of three types, those with a Numeric Value (representing its basic combat strength) of 0-7, those with no numeric value and a symbol that matches the back of the cards (known as 'mythology cards') and those that have both (and may be played thus in more than one way).

Each side places out cards in a grid, that starts as 3 cards in a row, and can grow to have 4 columns of 3 cards in each row. Cards are kept upside down and concealed (stratego style) until they are revealed in combat and then stay face up.

Each deck has a hostage card (Io or Argus) and the goal is to gain the other player's hostage, cause them to be unable to take all their moves, or eliminate all their cards on the playing field.

The decision on who starts is cute, the last person to eat in a Greek restaurant starts, if neither has ever done so or last did so together, then the player who is playing Hera goes first. The game takes quite a bit of cunning, and mathematics can be of a great help, but luck and logic in determining why the other player is or isn't doing something helps.

There are some opponents you don't want to attack without the right attacker, but which otherwise never attack (like the Medusa), and some opponents that are weak but numerous, like the Pegasus, which works as a good card to expose your opponent's hidden cards - and also has the odd feature of being able to take Hera or Zeus off the playing field, guess they can't pass up a good pony ride :-)

Combat, once initiated, is simply a matter of comparing card number values, except when dealing with mythology cards that also have specials, as they can at times override the number (ex: attacking Pandora, a value 0, causes all the cards in the same column to be discarded as they are freed from the game of the gods, just as all the things within her box were freed in her myth, both good and ill).

The game took us a bit longer than the box claims is average (they say 40 minutes, it took us a bit over an hour) but that may have been a matter of unfamiliarity with the special effects of cards and that we tend to play competitive games more cautiously than many other folks. Overall I found the production values excellent (with the one minor printing glitch aside regarding the coloring of the card backs), the mechanics worked well and were easy to pick up on, and the game was challenging and well balanced.

I recommend it highly, and think it would also make a great gift for younger players (since it is not a collectable card game and thus requires no additional investment or materials) and would probably work well for younger ages than the box says (which claims its for age 12 and up).

Comments On IR #39:

Normally I would have a lot of comments on an issue, but this issue was largely fiction, with little in the way of articles or commentary to hook into (Dale's zine had the most I would respond to, but with him leaving it seems moot.) All the fiction was enjoyed, but I don't have any specific comments or questions regarding it. I hope that all of you continue to contribute some when time allows. Thanks!

Practical Demonkeeping (Book Review)

Author: Christopher Moore
Publisher: Avon Trade Paperbacks
Price : \$13.00 US / \$19.95 CAN.

I picked this up after it was recommended by Tyler at Pandemonium Books & Games as one of his weekly fiction picks.

It falls into that wonderful category of "Modern Fantasy" or "Urban Fantasy", where the setting has great similarity to the world we live in, and yet a wonderful existential surreal quality that lurks beneath the surface waiting to be discovered.

In this case, the action centers around Pine Cove California, a Politically Correct Renamed old whaling town turned tourist trap just south of the great Big Sur wilderness area on the coast highway.

The buildings mostly sport English Tudor facades, making it an anomaly among the other Spanish-Moorish architecture towns that dominate the towns on the road. Tourist and locals rarely interact, and even keep mostly separate places of business, hiding the reality from the visitors that lies beneath the facades.

What Pine Cove is mostly is dysfunctional, with small time drunks, an ex-hippie drug pusher, a broken down bar owner with more artificial parts than original organic ones in her body, a recently separated waitress with a washed up drunk of a photographer for a husband, and all the usual abusive and exploitive relationships that can be found in the modern world.

And beneath that layer lies another, one seeped in strange faiths, old magic and forgotten beings. There's the local bi-sexual Neo-pagan Witch's coven that's run by a woman that thinks all men are barely domesticated animals beneath their civilized appearance and is known to drive women away from their husbands and into her arms (and who uses her magic in a less than ethical manner to control a number of the men, and is not above using her own bed to do it).

There's a self-taught Zen Master Fisherman Bait Shop Owner, and the pseudo-Englishman who runs a wonderful locals restaurant, H.P.'s Café, a firm believer in the Elder Gods and who's menu is a humorous reminder of a famous author of horror, and his own attempt to keep them from entering back into the world.

"Today's special is Eggs-Sothoth - a fiendishly toothsome amalgamation of scrumptious ingredients so delicious that the mere description of the palatable gestalt could drive one mad."

Into this enters a hundreds year old ex-seminarian (who doesn't look a day over 25) and road scholar, Travis O'Hearn accompanied by his own personal indestructible demon in tow, which only he can see when its not eating (and which grows three times its size when it goes to eat - mainly by eating people with a head-first and all encompassing bite).

Travis is in town because he thinks he knows how to get rid of the demon once and for all, if he can find someone he knew back when he first left the seminary during WW I. The demon, Catch, doesn't care, he's here for the free food (and figures there's plenty of fresh flesh to munch on in Pine Cove).

Now, add in the arrival of the not-so-impressive King of the Djinn, who wants to send Catch back to the Netherworld, A Detective who wants to make a big drug bust so he won't end up working in a convenience store, a police computer technical expert who is in love with the online identity ('Roxanne') of a very male motel night clerk, a home grown pool shark, and a wood-carving WWI infantry veteran.

Stir Well, and shake vigorously as the cast of characters intermix and seek to thwart the demon and save Pine Cove from becoming its perfect eating ground with all those wonderful passing-thru ethnic meals.

The mysteries are neat, the puzzle pieces fall together with Synchronicity to form a vivid and interesting plot that hold up well along the way.

My only complaint with the novel is that it ends slightly too quickly - I think the "tying up the loose ends" chapters could have used another five pages to finish the character development (they feel a bit rushed) after the story is over.

It's a fun book, with a few hearty laughs and a number of nifty chuckles and hidden in-jokes for readers of horror and fantasy.

Its 243 pages went rather quicky and painlessly, and I think that it would be great if the author would return to the characters sometime in a future novel, as Pine Cove comes across as a perfect landscape for this mixture on the border between reality and nightmare.

On Furry Pirates...

Cindy did a good review recently of the Atlas Games *Furry Pirates* RPG in regards to the mechanics, but to be fair I feel its necessary to speak about the parts that she didn't cover that deserve some praise.

Specifically, she said little in regards to the setting information, which is where I think that *Furry Pirates* should receive some praise. Unlike other games set in the period, *Furry Pirates* tackles the entire world of the period, converting lots of real historical data in regards to the state of piracy, politics and the like.

Included is a nice selection of historical figures in brief, converted of course into furry anthromorphics to fit their alternative earth premise, but it is well researched and could be of value to anyone running a swashbuckling game in general.

Additionally the ship section is much more extensive than that found in any game I've seen to date for the time period, with 21 pages of the books being devoted to the wide variety of ships found throughout the world and in use, including those of the Far East (which are ignored by nearly all other game materials on the period).

I would suggest getting the book for this well researched historical information, and combine it with GURPS Swashbuckler and some other mechanic to produce a campaign.



Mechanics. Style & Me

One of my projects right now is to expand, improve and eventually present a 3rd version of the *Cosmic Synchronicity RPG*. This led me into discussions with players, GMs and designers in regards to the concepts of style being applied to mechanics.

Cosmic has a simple mechanic for task resolution and combat skill usage, which primarily centers on the use of percentile dice and trying to rolling under a goal number (usually the character's skill ranks or an attribute expressed as a percentile value).

Its damage system involves adding a few flat-rate numbers (one for a weapon base, one for the character's BODY or COORDINATION attribute, and in some cases the Character's Skill Rank) to a random die (either d20 or d10).

This means that the randomness of the result is fairly limited, especially when you might be adding as much as a total of 50 points to the die rolled. From this is subtracted Armor and character Toughness, and the remainder is applied to the body locale that was determined as being hit.

The problem is that although the result is that weapons are very likely to maim or kill with one or two successful attacks, making it fairly deadly. This may be realistic, but is not my only intended style (which is meant to be also include at least heroic if not what they often call 'cinematic' these days).

So I went on a quest to develop a supplemental mechanic to achieve what I consider Heroic/Cinematic, and discussed the concept with a wide range of players. Unfortunately not all the feedback I received was useful or really supported my ideals. I think that I have discovered a new "design gap" in regards to what many people label as cinematic, and what they actually mean.

One of the big stickler points I've encountered is that a large number of folks have the belief that the way to achieve a cinematic style is to:

- 1) Give PCs some or complete Script immunity from getting killed or seriously wounded in the game. (That is, eliminating real risk in play).
- 2) Divide characters in the game into "Name" and "Nameless" categories. Name Characters are the PCs, their Dependents and Significant Contacts, patrons and the Really Big important adversaries. Name characters are built like player characters (maybe better in the case of the top villain so that it takes 2 or more PCs to actually take them out in a fight and thus some teamwork) Nameless characters (what Feng

Shui calls "Mooks" and other games might call cardboard adversaries, strawmen, orcs or cannon fodder) are wimpy beings that should go down with one or two attacks being landed on them, not be designed in detail but simply made up off the top of the head, and not have weapons capable of really killing PCs.

3) Make Sure the PCs have the most powerful weapons, magic, etc. so that they can eventually overcome any number of opponents. Make sure opponents are never as skilled as the PCs.

4) Make sure to have crucial mistakes or an Achilles heel built in to every opponent they might face (The "Before I Kill You Mr. Bond" Syndrome.) Even if its obviously silly.

5) Cheat on the Dice rolls or other randomizer methods to make sure that as long as the PCs are following a pre-generated plot script that they will succeed at what they are doing, and if necessary re-write the opposition if they seem to be likely to be overwhelmed.

None of these sorts of opinions really fit my own viewpoint of what a Cinematic game should be like. I'm confused as to where all these GMs and Designers have come up with these concepts and built them into their games and into their style.

I'm also confused by players who enjoy either
1) Being railroaded along a scripted 'plot' or
2) Having someone cheat to ensure that they succeed and won't die at whatever they are doing.

How can that be fun? Where's the Challenge? Where's the Risk? Where's the real raw emotion in roleplaying if you know that death has no sting? Where is the ability to choose

your own direction, destiny and explore the world setting as well as the situation you are experiencing?

Now, its not that I am a "killer" GM. No PC has died in any game I have run in the past 7 years. The last character that was killed in one of my games was killed by pure player stupidity. But player characters do fail, do get captured, do get wounded (sometimes sufficiently to put them out of play for long periods of time), do have family problems, do get in trouble with authorities for their actions, etc.

To me cinematic means that there should be an almost swashbuckling style, a need for flair, bravado, creativity, and true emotional displays by the characters involved.

It also means that combats should not be quick and easy, but that they should be drawn out and just as exciting as the rest of the game (combats, when I run modern games, are rare, occurring maybe every 4th or 5th gaming session), whether a matter of a duel, a brawl or a gun battle that looks like it came from a Clint Eastwood film or a Chase scene that covers several miles of varying terrain (like in a James Bond film). It means that everyone, hero and villain, gets a chance in the limelight to show off a bit, and that very few should be the folks that go down from a single shot or sword blow (No Mooks!).

It feels to me that some of the players, GMs and game designers who take the other direction in the games are like the sort of folks I've encountered in playing Diablo and other online games that would rather cheat and create an undefeatable character with a God-mode ability so that they can then just sit back and kill off the other players that wander into the game in a strange almost homicidal glee to see how big a body count they can tally up.

(Of course, in the case of GMs, this can also go the other route, and produce the “Killer GM” if they decide that they and not the Players should be building up the body count).

Others may believe that the concept of a cinematic style is to represent certain movies (while ignoring those that go against the style) that have a similar feel (like many of the Hong Kong Action Films and some of Hollywood’s offerings over the past 20 years).

Or perhaps I have a twisted viewpoint, and can’t see the fun in leaving a high body count or simply ignore the piles of the dead when I watch the various versions of “The Three Musketeers”, “Die Hard”, “Star Wars”, Indiana Jones, James Bond etc. Maybe I’m too seeped in a realism where every fight should have the risk of defeat or death, but a need for combats to not be quick and instant either.

Flawed villains in my games are usually villains that act like real people, and have limits in regards to their ruthlessness or that have motives that can be used against them, not big red buttons in their secret lairs that will self destruct everything on them if you push them (and are labeled “Emergency Destruct” or “Don’t Touch!”).

I occasionally use a “mob” or a collection of shambling undead zombies that some might consider to fill the position of “straw men” but never without them having risk possibilities built into confronting them (I don’t care how great a hero is, if an entire football team decides to tackle them they are going to have a good chance of ending at the bottom of the pile. But a skilled hero, with luck and tactics, might get out of a fight with 2 or 3 opponents in relatively good condition). And even then I tend to write up a template for their stats.

Anyway, my cure for Cosmic is to build some optional mechanics of various complexity and reducing the amount of “flat” damage totals to be inflicted into the equation, replacing them a wider range and number of dice (a miniature “dice pool”) that is equally faced off against by randomly effective Armor and personal toughness (again using a competing “dice pool”) so that the possible results from each successful hit is more random.

Additionally we’ve added a wide range of maneuvers and specials skills that one might take for a character to make their actions more colorful when described within the game. And added a nifty tweak or two to reward daredevil/swashbuckling behavior by having more damage done by those who take risks and succeed.

Finally, in designing all this, I’ve lowered the damage threshold, so that the weapons do less damage to character’s bodies directly on each blow, so that instant kills are nearly impossible by aiming and shooting at a head, and so that limbs are not so easily broken (though they can still be broken) or severed.

I’d like to hear from IR contributors in regards to how they have handled this same problem if they have approached it, and their fixes for some of the commercial mechanics (GURPS for example is far too fatal, even with the cinematic rules, for both PCs and opponents to truly be cinematic in play - does anyone have some house rules to cure the problems in GURPS?).



The Patriot (Movie Review):

The latest Mel Gibson film came out on a Wednesday instead of the usual Friday that new films are released, and so I was able to go and see it early on at a late morning matinee with only about half a dozen other people in the theater.

It's a Revolutionary War film, set in South Carolina, and obviously draws from the historical activities of Francis Marion, otherwise known as the "Swamp Fox" but renamed within the movie to be known as "The Ghost". I think the main reason for the name change was to avoid legal confrontations with Walt Disney, who did a TV show on the Swamp Fox in the 60s and may be trying to claim a trademark on the name (a ridiculous thing, but who wants to spend millions to prove them wrong) as they have claimed on Daniel Boone and fictional folks like Sinbad the sailor.

He was an officer in the French & Indian war, who then retired to be a plantation owner, father many children, and become an important man in local politics in South Carolina until the revolution.

The movie, as to be expected, goes to great effort to make Mel Gibson's character a reluctant hero who goes off to war after the death of his son, the loss of his home, and the arrest of his oldest son as a spy. Most of this has little to do with the real person, but makes for audience motivation to care about the actions of the character.

Once he finally decides that there is no option to avoid involvement, the character gets involved in a big way. Gets made a colonel and given orders to raise a militia and delay the British advancement of Cornwallis from the South to the North for 6 months so that the French Fleet can arrive to save the day....

(Historically this is not accurate since the Swamp fox was given a command in 1775, and the fleet would not arrive, or even be expected, until 1781).

So it's a story of a reluctant hero, a skirmish guerilla war against the British, and intermixed with a love story, the cruelty of the British Dragoons and the failure of Cornwallis to curb the actions of the dishonorable dragoon leader that targets civilians instead of soldiers.

Despite its historical inaccuracies the story, and presentation work well. I do think that the director could have cut a little less out of the personal interaction (perhaps reducing the battle scenes a tad) as there are a couple of places where they feel choppy and the pacing is too fast on how things change between the characters (including the relationship between Mel Gibson's character and his son and the two main female characters).

The battle scenes are done a little too graphically for my like (shots of soldiers having a limb or head hit by a cannon ball close to the camera are just a bit more realism that I need from a movie, its obviously included for its shock value, not historical accuracy).

So, in general, I would rate the film as a solid B+, worth seeing for the price I paid, but probably not worth paying a non-matinee ticket price (though it may be worth to see when it comes out on video or dvd).

REFUGEE

GEORGE PHILLIES
87-6 PARK AVENUE
WORCESTER MA 01605
508-754-1859
PHILLIES@WPI.EDU

MINUTEGIRLS

PREFACEthere's been another battle at the Clarksburg warp point. Some villains appeared and got shot to pieces. They were perhaps surprised that the defending fleet was much bigger than the last one. The States of Lincoln Popular Defence Committee had asked Morbius to send an investigator or aide. Sandra Miller did her tour of Lincoln, noted indications that something was about to happen at the warp point, and arranged to be in the interesting location at the interesting time. There is a single large fragment of a single large hostile ship in moderately intact form. Unfortunately, it's dropping sunwards at nine thousand miles per second. All too soon, it will be two AU or so from Alpha Centauri, hit the Lincoln orbital defense screen, and use its kinetic energy to blow itself apart. The good guys would like to recover it, but that's not so easily done. As we enter, Grand Commodore Ter-Minassian is having a discussion with the States of Lincoln Popular Defense Committee.

ARMoured CRUISER ISANDLHWANA
SUNWARDS OF CLARKSBURG WARP POINT
1837 HOURS, 15 JUNE 2074

"I entirely understand the need for technical intelligence," answered Ter-Minassian. "However, I do not have a Fleet Tug with me. My ships lack towing points and capture nets. In eight hours, that hulk encounters the Lincoln Orbital Defense Screen. It burns to plasma. I am very open to suggestions, but lack technical means to alter the situation." He looked away from the camera. It would an hour before he had a response from ground. "Unless someone here has an idea?" The question went to Isandlhwana's entire crew. Ter-Minassian waited, not expecting an answer. "We still have time to find an answer, people. Let's stay on it." He had not anticipated a half-raised hand from Sandra Miller. "Yes?" he whispered.

"Board and search," she proposed.

"Armed detachment. Servots to haul off anything useful."

"Alas," said Captain Wolf, "Isandlhwana lacks a Naval Landing Detachment. We covered a lot of contingencies for warp point defense. We even have internal defenses, just in case the EU shows up with boarding torpedoes." The staff smiled at the joke. Boarding Torpedoes were another staple of Star Commando Jill. "Well, we do. But only sidearms for the human crew, and only skinsuits, not even hardened suits for prowling a pile of shifting wreckage."

"I'll go," announced Sandra. "I have power armor. And considerably more than a sidearm."

"There's only one of you," noted Wolf politely. "And there's such a thing as vacuum training."

"That section is open to vacuum, and got cooked by graser fire. It's dead. I've got vacuum mods on my suit, and vacuum's only a moderate CBRW hazard. Besides," Sandra continued dismissively, "One Minutegirl. Less than one enemy ship. They don't stand a chance."

"Semper Fi!" Swenson whispered in support. Ter-Minassian made a private note to himself. He really had to talk to Swenson about her political inclinations, before she wrecked a promising career. If personnel decided that she supported a reviving a standing army, even a small one inside the System Defense Fleet, her promising career was very definitely not going anywhere. That should be Wolf's job, but so far as he could tell Allison Wolf's primary career objective was a healthy early retirement.

"Actually," noted Mjojo, "even in the old Marines, one-man boarding parties were not commonly expected to capture battleships."

"It is a dead ship fragment," Ter-Minassian agreed with Sandra. "The EU does not use servots for internal security. At least, it never has before. We should have a neutrino scan complete in another 15 minutes, and be alongside -- as close as we're getting, in another," he stared at a screen, "fifteen minutes beyond that. Ms. Miller, you'll be on the bridge, ready to go, in twenty minutes. And you will be back here within five hours, no matter what. Get going."

"Sir!" Sandra saluted and headed for the door.

ARMoured CRUISER ISANDLHWANA
SUNWARDS OF CLARKSBURG WARP POINT
1852 HOURS, 15 JUNE 2074

Ter-Minassian, Wolf, MacPherson, and Miller stood shoulder to shoulder in a display bay, staring at a scaled-down image of the hulk.

"It's strange beyond belief," said MacPherson. "There aren't even decks, floors that are flat and parallel. The

only way those corridors are level is if there's a separate grav plate every thirty feet -- and even that doesn't explain these volumes." His light pen selected a region of the ship in which near-spherical rooms lay packed like grapes on the vine, the volume between the rooms seemingly being filled with metal foam. "I thought these might be gas storage, but those are corridors leading into them, not pipes."

Sandra stared at the model, finally bringing a full scale view up on a side screen. "No problem with tight fits," she said. "The corridors are all twenty feet or so, across and up. Or whichever way gravity used to point in them. Or is there still gravity?"

"None," answered Swenson. "The hull is cooling, no heat sources in sight. From battle recordings, weapons sections were below; explosions suggested engineering and power were rearwards. The scans don't show any imbedded strange matter, so if this ship followed other EU designs -- it obviously doesn't -- nothing here ran at high power. There are traces of spatial distortion on scanning some rooms, what you'd expect from radiation hardening of selected living quarters. I suppose those globular rooms could be living quarters for a French officer and his harem."

"Pray tell," asked Ter-Minassian, "If nothing here ran at high power, how did this section get its screening?"

"Central projection," answered Swenson. "Before we wrecked it up, this ship looked to be a spherical bubble. Even though the ship was cigar-shaped, its defense screens were just a big sphere. Not the way we'd do things, but it worked."

"Rather better than I'd prefer," concurred Wolf.

"Not well enough, though," said Ter-Minassian. "Ms. Miller, the way here appears open. You can lead servots up this -- I'll call it a corridor. The rooms here appear to have been ceramic-armored heavily, and might be interesting. Otherwise try working through one of the grape clusters."

"Done," agreed Sandra.

"Once we start reading corridor signs," said MacPherson, "we'll try to get you better advice. Your shuttle should be in the service corridor now," he added.

"On my way," agreed Sandra. She turned, power armor padding softly on the floor despite its substantial weight. Mjojo counted to himself the armament she was carrying. Plasma pistol. Assault rifle. Grenades. Satchel charges. A strange-matter melee sword, a hand-and-a halber from its handle. Three sensor packs; a servile fractional-AI in a kit behind her shoulder blades.

UNKNOWN HULK

SUNWARDS OF CLARKSBURG WARP POINT

1917 HOURS, 15 JUNE 2074

"Approaching main corridor," Sandra radioed. "I'm stopped a hundred feet outside the ship. I don't see loose parts; lidar isn't picking things up. I'll leave the platform when I land. Microservot has entered the hulk in the corridor ahead of me, illuminating. No activity is apparent. Going in." She nudged controls. The servile in the EVA platform edged her into the corridor. "There's a narrow area that's badly chewed up. That looks like a very big sliding door, set to block the corridor. It's mostly retracted, but runners in the floor are recessed." She edged closer.

"What's this?" she asked. "Cluster of lights, about halfway up -- uessing I'm upside up -- the wall. I'll close on them. Four lights, three bright, one dim. Funny colors. A slightly green yellow. A slightly red orange, copper color. Royal blue. A really deep violet. A dozen stalk switches, with labels." She paused. "AI can't translate the labels," she announced. "You're getting downloads. I thought I had a complete linguistic package."

"Your signal is loud and clear," confirmed MacPherson. "Ship library is not translating. And our package is complete."

"Perhaps it's European Art," suggested Sandra. "Looks odd. Makes no sense. I'm entering the corridor. My doppler radar came up. Tons of echoes. If I stop, there are no doppler shifts, nothing moving on side corridors. Let me know when you've got the echoes unscrambled."

"Not too long," said MacPherson. "Round corridors make life simple."

Sandra drifted into the corridor, eyes glancing from left to right. A gentle pressure on one wrist was the sensor readout from combat nanites, keeping her pulse and blood pressure from skyrocketing. "Corridor is clean," she reported. "Peculiar things sticking from the floor. Like a ladder, but way too big, too far apart."

"Zero-gee grab bars," observed Mjojo. "You used to see them on ships likely to fly with no working grav plates. The motion is like swimming along the bottom of a swimming pool, pulling yourself along."

"Coming up on a cross-corridor," announced Sandra. "I've got picture feed from the lead servot. More featureless corridor. I'm looking for corridor nameplates, frame numbers, that

sort of thing. Way up -- or down -- on the wall." She gestured with a light pen. Servots rose to examine the markings.

"No translation here, either," she announced. "Could it be like those old fashioned European roadsigns?" she asked. "No words, just icons."

"Say again?" queried Wolf.

"Pre-Incursion road signs copied Europe. Across the ocean, they had a continent full of illiterates, so everyone had to memorize picture icons for "stop", "no turn", whatever, all black squiggles and red squares, something like that," answered Sandra.

"I'm continuing along the corridor. Just a moment while I blank the servot lights... There are rows of really dim lights along the floor and ceiling, under the grab bars. They're that copper color again. Just a second... switched to polyspectral, false colors. There's a near infrared glow behind the wall art. And that violet -- there's another set of amps on the next sliding door -- that violet is as bright as the others. But it's narrow band, peaked in the ultraviolet," said Sandra.

"I've got a microservot with wide-band polychrome cameras," said MacPherson. "It's passing your 11 o'clock forwards. Nothing beyond what you've spotted. Walls are really warm -- close to 120 Fahrenheit."

"Walls are the ugliest color scheme I've ever seen. Let's advance," said Sandra. "It's another 200 feet linear to the interesting rooms. Are signals clear?"

"Like a bell," said MacPherson. "We're getting a little clutter from multiple signal paths, but nothing digital filters can't handle."

"OK. I'm making yet another zig and zag. You know, not only do these corridors pop up, down, and sideways, they corkscrew. Those grab bars have spiraled half-way around, from bottom to top," she reported.

"They seem to keep doing it," said MacPherson.

"And tons of emergency lights," said Sandra. "More than night on the Isandhlwana. You sure this ship is dead?"

"Grazers fried it good," reminded MacPherson. "It's an EU ship. They overdo emergency lights. You think they have a sense of the value of money?"

"They don't have money," reminded Sandra.

"Please Stop!" came Swenson's voice.

"Holding." Sandra clung to a grab bar.

"Doppler array is getting shifted signals. No, it's stopped. Faint. Hard to interpret. Echo times implied, oh, a

ten foot cube. We must have been seeing your cargo servots," she finally answered, "through a shaky path. Nothing else is vaguely that big. Go ahead."

"Advancing. Coming up on the XYZ intersection," Sandra said. "The scan was right. It's three perpendicular corridors, and an open space. Makes no sense. You must have walked through a 90 degree bend from straight ahead to straight down. OK, these grab bars show how you were supposed to navigate it. Spiral around the edge. I'm following. Cross-corridor lights are out -- must have just illuminated the main corridor."

"Miss Miller," came MacPherson's voice. "Could you illuminate the cross-corridors? The microservot concentrated a bit too much on your intended path -- destination is just around the next bend."

"One at a time," she announced.

"Right -- open door and a bend. Down -- open door and that Y split you see on the map. Neutrino tomography has been fine so far. Left -- scratch that. Scan showed that door as closed. It's open. And I'm finally getting an atmosphere trace. Low, but more than outgassing. Mostly water vapor and organics."

"Think ice cream," said Swenson.

"There's a mass spec on one of the servots. That's what the analysis looks like. Someone was having desert, went to battle stations, and dropped it."

"OK," answered Sandra. "Hold a moment. I don't have line of sight to up. I'm going to do a slow leap straight across that drop, give you illumination straight up on the way by." She shifted the flashlight to her right hand, grabbed a bar, and very gently pushed off with her left. Her suit AI corrected her grip so her pushoff gave her no spin. "On my..."

"DOPPLER ALERT! DOPPLER ALERT!" screamed the AI. "INCOMING ZENITHWARDS! INCOMING..."

Sandra's left hand snapped to her pistol. A clench of fingers inverted function on her combat nanites. Her pulse ramped. Adrenaline surged. The suit switched her air feed to combat emergency mixture -- 1% CO2; 99% O2.

"Nothing in sight!" She was at the center of the intersection, floating in space. "Noth... Eat radiant death, Frenchie!" she screamed, suddenly happy for regularly practicing off-hand aiming. A plasma bolt cut at their waists... No, it was a miss, the Frenchman's legs were all off the floor... Her right hand released the flashlight, reached sidewise. How many legs? Weren't Frenchmen bipedal? Combat frame swung her assault rifle into position. Left hand corrected aim, fired at torso.

here were a whole stack of them, all in a bunch, too dark to see clearly, and here came a second fire team, right behind the first, all again in a bunch,

Hit! She was totally out in open, and they hadn't shot back yet...idiots, they were, and...Assault Rifle came up, thumb snapped off safety, set fire to Full Automatic.

"WEAPONS FAILURE. TAYLOR SUPPRESSION FIELD," warned the AI Heads Up Display. "Plasma Pistol Inoperative. Please reconfigure Assault Rifle to chemical operating mode."

"Oh, grelk!" she cursed. The Lincoln folks had reset her rifle to Gauss firing mode, meaning its power packs were down, too. "Reconfigure! Reconfigure!" She dropped her pistol, reached for her melee sword. Grenades when the other guys had cover and you didn't were not optimal. Fortunately the power armor EVA pack had big batteries. Right arm snapped back, waiting for the combat frame to recover the rifle. The pistol's lanyard was powered and would do its recovery automatically. A combat frame was a bit slower.

The Frenchman -- there were two of them, huge, and how many grelking legs did a Frenchman have, anyhow? -- were leaping at her. Sword came to guard position. Lights behind her flared bright. Someone was trying to dazzle them with servot headlamps.

The light also meant that she could see her opponents clearly. Now, she decided, was too late to remember the rampable night vision option on her suit. Where had it been? The suit servile had noted she was in a lighted building and disabled it.

For all their size and number of legs, they were not that fast. When you were the size of a small elephant, slow took on a different meaning. Of course, she noted, in zero gee speed was not exactly the advantage it was on earth. She slipped back into center. Giant crayfish, the head of a star mole, tentacles and all, was how she would describe them. So much for the grelking lie EUs didn't do biosculpts. She was vaguely aware of a cacophony of voices screaming in her ear; all thirty-eight people on Isandhlwana must be trying to tell her something different at the same time.

It had the claws of a lobster, she noted, with the large one converging on her midriff. Leg came up to block the lower claw. Sword swung at the upper, its strange-matter blade slicing through exoskeleton and flesh like a serving knife through blueberry-orange marmalade. There was a shock of impact. Arms and shoulders held off the upper claw. The sword was jammed, buried up to the hilt. Her right leg was forced up, knee almost into stomach.

She straightened convulsively, pushing apart the claws. Left hand braced, elbow locked, pushing against the pad on the upper claw, letting her pull the sword out.

Tentacles looped across the space around her -- it was trying to drag her into its fangs. The Frenchman tried hard to close its claws and crush her flat. She planted both legs on the lower claw, pushed away, weaving the sword defensively against the tentacles. Two sliced apart. The rest withdrew very quickly. The strain of holding the claw open tested the limits of her strength. Power armor only helped a bit, especially on battery power. She hacked at the claw, once and again, gouging out large sections. The space around her was filling with a violet cloud. Was it bleeding? Blue blood?

Sandra stretched ahead, targeting the joint, her right arm's hardest blow behind the swing. The joint parted. The upper claw floated into space. The lower claw jerked away, then swung back, very, very fast. An X-block caught most of the blow; the rest took her hard in the stomach. Ceramic armour insets or not, the blow winded her, sending her flying backwards at a corridor wall.

Now the suit servile recognized the hazard, stiffening the armor, locking her into place so the impact spread across her entire body. What could have been a bonebreaking shock was instead only jarring. She reached for a grab-bar. Forcing herself to ignore a need to breathe, she pulled herself up, wedging her legs against a stanchion. Her opponents skittered sideways as they moved ahead. That spiral in the grab-bars matched their run.

The rear creature flung things at her. What were they? Somewhat like throwing stars, but larger than dinner plates. She moved with the flow of her suit, the suit AI assisting her block of object after object with melee sword. Suit radar helped; visibility was rapidly deteriorating.

Now they were coming at her again. When was her rifle coming up? The suit HUD display was counting paralytically toward zero. Meleeing a pair of elephant prawns sounded lots less fun than shooting them. She pushed backwards down the corridor, snatching a reconfigured assault rifle from her combat frame. Her turn put her feet behind her so she landed on the further corridor wall, feet and knees bringing her almost to a standstill.

Shot selector went again to full automatic. The lead prawn -- Frenchman seemed a stretch; were these shipboard food animals, escaped from the galley? -

- took a burst without substantial apparent damage. It also hadn't slowed down, not that it was fast to begin with. She switched the rifle to its grenade launcher function. The first two rounds were modified shotgun shells. Rounds 3-6 were incendiary. Time delay let grenades penetrate the integument, so grenades detonated inside the creatures, illuminating their innards. The array of body parts would have been fascinating if most of them hadn't been dedicated to having her for lunch. She followed with a full clip of rifle autofire, to disappointing effect.

This appeared to be satchel charge time, she decided, unless she wanted to close to hand-to-hand combat. She could always do that later. Very soon, hand-to-hand might be her one option. Her armor would officially stop the fragmentation components; in vacuum, she could think of safer bets. She jumped at cover. Before she reached it, the forward prawn blew apart. Steam explosion? she wondered. It had certainly been heated enough, all the way inside, with lines of flaming lithium/magnesium/oxidizer under its shell..

Almost instantly, the sliding portal across the corridor slid shut. Four inches thick! she thought. That sliding panel had to be four inches thick, and it slammed so hard she could feel the wall vibrate. Even if there were safety interlocks, you really didn't want to get in the way of one of those doors.

"Night vision!" she shouted. A 360 degree sweep of the room appeared on her HUD, bright as day, empty of giant prawns. Her Doppler radar wasn't showing any motion, either line of sight or around corners. "Isandhlwana," she said, "Data on those biosculpts. Anything? And they were doing space naked, no vacuum suits, too. Please advise." There was silence. "Isandhlwana, do you read?" she asked.

"Loss of carrier," responded her suit's servile. "Main signal path is blocked by corridor bulkheads."

Now what? she asked herself. "Servots in range?" she asked.

The suit servile ran down a list. "Servots ran through the intersection while you were in combat," it explained. "Everything came through except two of the cargo haulers."

Sandra stared at her map. This was one of the interesting rooms, but what was it? Giant metallic mushroom stalks, six feet tall or more, rose at random from various walls. Their tops were covered with masses of lights and few-inch-long rods. This was not a dead-end corridor; there were several other routes out of the ship. "Why aren't we getting signals from Isandhlwana," she asked, "down some of the other corridors?" She gestured at the projected hologram of the map.

"Signals propagating along these paths are received," announced the suit servile. "They are cancelled as arbitrary noise, to optimize signal quality down the primary path."

"We're receiving them?" asked Sandra. What did the AI think it was doing? "Let me hear the loudest. Now!"

"...your situation. I repeat again, please report your situation," asked MacPherson. "We are getting datalinks but not voice. Can you hear me, Sandra? We are getting..."

"Miller here," she answered. "Isandhlwana, do you read? This is Miller. There was some AI interface question on my radio; please report a patch. Radio should be up now."

"MacPherson answering," came his voice. "Bulkheads on main corridor closed on both sides of the EU crew you encountered. We don't know why. We're doing a new neutrino scan. What is the status of the EU combatants?"

"I think they're dead," she reported. "They'd better be. They each had an incendiary grenade detonate inside their midsections. Where did they come from?" she asked.

"There all along," MacPherson answered. "We ID'd a closed compartment on the neutrino scan. Almost all compartments show as open to vacuum, but there was a sealed one off the intersection."

"Are there many more of these?" she asked.

"We're evaluating. We have a servot patch. It'll let the servots do a systematic sweep of the hulk, without teleoperation. Full search takes ten minutes."

"OK. Servots are picking up loose bits and pieces?" she asked.

"Correct. We'd like one of those mushrooms, but don't see mounting brackets," he answered.

"One moment," she answered. Assault rifle went back to its frame. Melee sword dropped into both hands. "Yieee!" she screamed as she swung. Her wrists took the shock as the blade swept through the support pylon. "Not attached any more," she announced.

"Thank you...oops. Check your seven!" MacPherson interrupted himself. She pivoted and stared. What did he see?

Ghostly tentacles now flapped loosely from behind a large cabinet. Doppler radar wasn't picking them up; they were just too small. Assault rifle again in her arms, she pushed herself sideways. Was it another prawn? Alive?

"Surface temperature is way below

the others," announced MacPherson. "Servots have checked the rest of the room. Don't see another one. We can stuff it in a cargo frame, get it out of here."

"Sounds good to me," she announced. "Is that clothing it's wearing?"

"Straps. Lots of straps. Leather or plastic. Things hanging from straps. Not clothing unless you've got old-fashioned tastes," answered MacPherson.

"Old-fashioned or strange," she answered. "Any sign of activity at XYZ?"

"Negative. We've got a small servot inside. We've got a lousy signal, are getting slow image scans. Can't see much. Radar seems to show slow-drifting lumps, no sign of rapid motion," MacPherson reported.

"I'm doing a look-see at the top of these mushroom stalks," she reported. "Funny color lights. Control wands. Funny spacing."

"Support proposes they were tentacle-operated," said MacPherson.

"That matches the height," she agreed. "How is the search going? And how did you manage to get the servots to search by themselves?"

"Almost complete," he reported.

"And some guy on the ground had Fire Department building search software -- for when you didn't know the warehouse layout, and the layout was 3-D -- and got our attention on it."

"My thanks. Are we finding things?" she said.

"Lots of empty rooms. Very few personal effects -- or what might be personal effects. Spiral grab bars everywhere -- looks like those creatures were crew, not housepets. And we have one pressurized room." A map came up before her, path from here to there being labeled.

"OK, I'll start moving. Can you try again on servot flank and rear coverage? I know they can't do anything, but the prawns are even uglier than my last blind date," she said.

"Morbis is getting soft?" asked a surprised Ter-Minassian.

"The date was way before I made Phoenix Guide," she answered. "On my way."

Another maze of corridors brought her to a bulkhead. Servots were busily erecting a pressure frame. "Routine search and rescue," announced MacPherson. "Passenger without skintights trapped in a pressurized compartment, vacuum outside. We tried sonar. There's something moving in there, but it's small, size of a dog, collie or retriever."

Sandra stiffened. "The EU keeps children way out of combat. Pet? Officer's child?"

"No data. We think those plaques are encrypted door signs. Can't crack the code."

"How's my signal?" she asked.

"Loud and clear. We've dropped some repeaters. Main corridor is still locked up. I've got a mechbot at the outer door. We're trying to drill that bulkhead. Hardened steel. Cuts a bit slowly. And we have a five minute procedures tape for you -- never thought we'd have you doing this, didn't think to show you how a pressure cage works. But we've got the cage, and a servot with a big pressurized volume for whatever is inside."

"Isandhlwana?" asked Sandra.

"Just occurred to me. I haven't seen even one houseplant here. Did your search find any?"

"Checking," answered MacPherson.

"Don't remember any. Give the training tape a whirl while we get the frame finished."

Ten minutes later Sandra stood to one side of the bulk head. Her power armor, no longer bloated by vacuum, lay soft against her skin. A high-power cutter was working its way across the armor, the circular contour it was cutting in the bulkhead being almost complete.

"We're running a small hole now. Checking pressure. OK, they're at 1.2 atmospheres. Ready on your suit?" asked MacPherson.

"Ready." She yawned deeply. It was easier to run up a few psi than to demand suit tensegrity.

"Pressure has matched. Mix inside is -- interesting. 5% Argon. CO2 level is up there, too, close to 1%. 4 psi O2. We're going to match composition, except for the argon." Sandra glanced at her chronometer. She had over 4 hours to go. She clenched her hand again, ramping up from alert to combat mode.

"OK. We have an optical fiber in. Huge room. Mostly empty. Very low tables scattered about. Looking for motion. Here's the image for your HUD. Don't see anyone in there. Look sharp. Someone may be in ambush mode. OK, Cutter is going to open the door. Now," reported MacPherson.

The servot pushed the door slab forward and sideways. Bright, thought Sandra, that room was definitely bright. And white, or slightly green. No sign of a surviving crew member. She let her servile drone its call for surrender, repeating in English, French, German, and Muscovite.

Sandra pushed into the room. No one had been visible through the optical fiber. No one appeared on the omniview,

either. "The sonar track," she asked. "Where do we think the moving object is?" She very much did not like this. Giant prawns were one thing. Invisible giant prawns were a bit much.

"HUD overlay ready," answered MacPherson.

Sandra triggered the data link. Near the back of the room, said the display. Behind those child-height tables. The lack lumps in the right places looked like antique beanbag chairs. Where? She took two cautious steps forward. The lumps unfolded. The closer reared up, four rear legs spread in an X, two middle legs holding a chair, two top legs folded toward the body. The rear lump split in two, two smaller creatures skittering many-legged toward a distant corner.

The two smaller creatures clung to each other. The larger one stayed in front, positioning itself between Sandra and the smaller ones. What were they? she wondered. The body structure was vaguely spiderlike, but they were covered with fur. And those were purses, or the like, belted to their bodies.

"Translate: Do you understand me?" she said to her servile. "EU and other languages, and stop if there's a response." Several minutes went by, the servile wandering from German to Tagalog to Loglan. "Stop. Let's try a holo display. I'd like this ship in battle, the current hulk, a blow-in showing where we are, and what's left of the rest of the ship."

"I've got that," said MacPherson. "And a still, this ship before we wrecked it. Displaying."

The display got the rapt attention of the three creatures. Sandra realized that there was a distant high-pitched whistle fluttering around her. A query to her suit servile revealed a source. The spiders chirped, almost in the ultrasonic.

"And I've got another display. It shows the biosculpts getting into the servot, and being transferred to our ship. We'll follow that with what happens to the hulk when it hits the orbital defense screen," said MacPherson. The whistle was far louder.

Slowly, the larger creature set down its chair. It waved its limbs at the smaller creatures, gestured at a large collection of boxes in one corner, gestured at the waiting cargo servot. Then it walked slowly up to Sandra. Carpet, she noted, the floor is a shag carpet, and the creature hangs on to the shag. It had set aside its weapon, not that it was much of a weapon. How did you judge body language in someone so radically biosculpted? The three biosculpts came across as more frightened than aggressive.

The biosculpt stood slowly up on hindmost legs, extended its finest front legs toward her. Her heart hammered. Poison? Or outreach? When it had been waving the

chair, those legs were folded up against the body. Guess those parts are fragile and get protected. She racked her assault rifle and extended her own hands, telling herself that she had armor, superior reach, and superior weight. It hadn't behaved like a warrior, and had no more appendages than a MinuteBoy in date-grope mode. Finger and thumb, ever so gently, met fingerparts.

The creature backed away, gestured at the boxes, gestured at her, gestured at the cargo servot. The two smaller creatures were running between the boxes and the cargo servot, carrying a few boxes each time. Luggage? Cargo? Valuables? Sandra decided she couldn't tell.

"Miller, this is Ter-Minasian," came the Grand Commodore's voice. "Let's help them bring everything along. We'll land you in a cutter, so we aren't risking the Isandhlwana. See if they aren't too frightened of servots. EU folks are, but these aren't exactly typical of our European opponents." Sandra stepped behind the boxes, which were wrapped in a mesh. She pushed against the floor, then against the wall, setting the mass of boxes drifting forward. A pair of handler servots grabbed other corners of the mesh. The three creatures began packing other bits of furniture. Cooperation, thought Sandra. They seem to understand cooperation.

"We're going to strip this compartment bare," announced Ter-Minasian, "As soon as your find is on its way. Oh, and we depressurized the XYZ intersection. There are lots of body parts, fried, steam heated, parbroiled, scorched,.... But both of the large Europeans appear to be quite dead."

"Commodore," answered Miller, "If I may make a suggestion?" Morbius was extremely emphatic about what his aides could do in situations like this. She was there to listen, and not to claim to represent his opinions.

"Proceed."

"Perhaps someone should reconsider? Is this an EU ship? I haven't seen a single humaniform. No plants. No EU seal logo on anything, nor a word in European. Layout resembles nothing I've read about. EU is horrified of biosculpt, even invisible patches? This ship was built for those prawns; look at the corridor size and the grab rails," she answered.

"Did you wish to propose an alternative owner?" asked Ter-Minassian. "The other nations with hyperships fly at EU tolerance, and never warships, to our knowledge. Besides: Japan, Java, Canton,

Saudi Arabia,...they use biosculpt to make people look more like each other."

"Agreed. But this ship could have escaped from Star Commando Jill. One of the weirder episodes," she answered.

"The Cumin Arc," responded Ter-Minassian. "My sons both watched it, replayed it, dissected it."

HUD marked an Isandhlwana officer looking to enter the conversation. "Weren't the Cumins the starting point of silliness?" asked Wolf. "The invaders from another planet, or something like that?"

"The probable having been eliminated," Ter-Minassian misquoted, "the impossible becomes probable. However, we can't readily treat this. The Planetary Defence Committee would be distressed if I wasted their money researching something so outre."

"I'll raise the question back home," Sandra answered dutifully. It seemed to be terribly well known that 'we can't handle that' translated as 'please ask Morbius to look into this'. What would they do if he didn't?

CUTTER FLASHMAN
LINCOLN HIGH ORBIT
1412 HOURS, 17 JUNE 2174

COAST DEFENSE ARTILLERY
PENNYORK CENTRAL BASE
HOURS, MARCH 2176

Data blocks, to appear at the start of earlier chapters. While most posts within the MinuteGirl ranks are logically named, the titles "Master of the Sword" and "Mistress of the Sword" both date from a far earlier era. The Master of the Sword is ultimately responsible for physical and combat aspects of MinuteGirl training. The usually-much-younger Mistresses of the Sword are the very small number of young women who represent the ultimate success of that training. The rank badge of the Master of the Sword is a small white-metal collar tab, in the form of two crossed swords. The rank badge of a Mistress of the Sword is a collar tab, in the form of a flat, black-metal sword. By custom, a Mistress of the Sword only wears her rank badge if she does not expect to return.

Metahype is an extremely potent temporary stimulant, giving the user dramatic increases in speed and strength. Metahype overuse is commonly fatal even in well-conditioned users. An encapsulated enzymatic support alters carbon dioxide storage and anaerobic metabolism, permitting the cautious user to hold her breath for far longer than would otherwise be the case. Readers should however, recognize that the 15-minute underwater swim is reserved for

Star Commando Jill and her fictional compatriots.

The EU has invaded from space, landing being possible because the Pennsylvania Coast Defence Artillery installation was compromised. Sandra Miller and various odds and sods, having recovered from boarding the EU Dreadnaught Deutschland, have entered the center. However, the Master Control Chamber is physically isolated; it is gravitationally suspended with a 20' air gap surrounding in all directions. The drawbridge has been retracted. The auxiliary control room cannot be used until Master Control is deactivated, for example if there are no living CDA officers in Master Control. As we reach the heroes, they are looking for a way in.

"Sparrow, I need your reaction pistol," Sandra said.

"Right here. A problem with yours?" Sparrow handed over the reaction gun.

"I'm going to take out the control chamber," Sandra announced. "I need the extra firepower, and these are the only firearms that work in there."

"Right."

"There's a way in?" asked Karen. "Where?"

"Straight up the middle," Sandra announced. "The working plan: I go straight up the main corridor. Gail, just before I hit the master control room hatch, you'll blow the interlocks, so the armor retracts. I then shoot the two people with the Y keys -- and their backup. Once they're dead, control reverts here. Fast as possible, Gail shuts everything down."

"On it," said Gail. "I'll do manual backup to a timing servile on popping the master control door."

"Questions?" asked Sandra.

"The rest of us?" asked Karen.

"Squad covers Gail here. That's mission critical. The rest of you, I can't give orders. But when control reverts, the drawbridge drops, and I could use company," Sandra answered.

"Sandra?" asked Gail. "I've got my part, but how are you getting to the door? I've got to track you to time hopping that hatch."

"Down the main corridor," Sandra answered. "It's a 20 foot gap. I'll jump it."

Jump an 20 foot gap? mouthed Gail. "There's a suppression field on it; your suit will be down."

"Which is why," said Sandra, "I'm leaving it behind." She spoke words to the suit servile. Intake and outtake ports retracted. Dorsal and ventral sections pivoted, leaving Sandra enough

space to step out of the armor. "I go in underboots, bodystocking, two pistols with ammo." She straightened tourniquet collars. "We're out of grenades?" Everyone checked once more and nodded. "That would have helped. And a double dose of methype. Do that just before I commit."

"I've got a simulation up on my screen," announced Gail. The women watched as a model Sandra leaped the gap, ran down the corridor center, hit the entrance portal just after the doors opened, and began shooting.

"A bit of a risk," said Sandra. "I need fast line of sight on the folks with Y keys." Gail toggled the display. Most of the room was a solid display table; users sat in chairs around its periphery. "Looks like there's no place to hide, and they all sit around the display table. Who else is in there?"

"Can't tell," announced Gail. "Could be maintenance techs. Advisers. Might be four of them total, from this, but it's fuzzy."

"Got to get off two sets of shots before they counter," said Sandra to herself. "Let's march!"

Gail spent moments rechecking the controls. The depower sequence was right in front of her, something that she knew how to do. She glanced up. Her squad had deployed, covering her back and the corridors beyond. Sandra was twenty yards down the corridor, the Girl Guides with her. A few covered the corridor each way. The rest were waiting.

Sandra pulled two ampoules from her medkit. "Fifteen seconds to full activity," she said to herself. She stabbed the two ampoules into her gluteals, a slight hiss marking the injectors. "And this for luck." She opened a sealed wrist pocket, withdrew a pin, and pushed it to her collar. The flat black sword stood out against the cloth. Her skin began to flush.

"...three, two, one, mark!" Sandra's earcomp tracked the effect of the drug, counting toward exact readiness. Sandra sprinted at the gap. Her final footfall launched her up, up, body flat, toward the far edge, into a gentle tuck, exploded to land both feet planted a yard beyond the edge, and resumed headlong run.

Gail watched while the servile counted down. Sandra made her corridor turns by bouncing hard off each corner wall. Hands to holsters, pistols drawn. Not slowing, Sandra charged at the final door. Gail's finger, shaking, hovered over the manual switch. The servile, precisely on time, triggered the over-rides.

Lights flared across Gail's control panel. Electromagnetic accelerators yanked the armor sideways, leaving Sandra with a

straight view in to Master Control

...and the three EU troopers blocking her path.

Crack-Crack-Crack went Sandra's pistols. The troopers had barely begun to point their weapons when twin red circles appeared on their faces. Sandra dropped into a spear kick. The trooper, already dead, brains spread across the room behind him, had not yet had time to fall.

Sandra barely felt the impact as her foot crushed his chest. Arms smashed sideways, knocking the other two troopers from their feet.

Where are the targets? Where are the targets? Where are the targets? Where are the targets? Methype enhanced neurons yammered through her brain.

Crack-Crack-Crack-Crack. A double-tap for each Y key holder. deCastro started to rise, a move cut off by enormous pain in his chest. He began to slump, no longer able to realize that Duane Versaro was preceding him to the floor.

Four more Americans in in Coast Defense White! Six more EU officers, two already raising their autopistols. Sandra continued her run across Master Control, kicking the first pistol, shooting the second armed EU officer in the head, scrambling sidewise for a line of sight on the four Americans. Americans dropped behind EU compatriots and ran for the rear exit.

Paths left and right blocked! Chairs, EU twerps struggling with pistol holsters. Jump onto the display table. One more EU officer drawing to fire. Too many to kill before they shot back. Crack! an American down. Crack! Double miss.

Admiral Mirabeau began firing as rapidly as possible. Miss. Then chest hits. One. Two. The first round tore through Sandra's heart. The second expanded on impact, shredding half of her left lung.

Sandra's tourniquet collars snapped shut. Loss of central blood pressure was their trigger; arms and brain retained a few seconds of oxygen. Yet another American! Crack! Crack!

Mirabeau shuddered. She was still shooting. His pistol recycled. Three. Four. Would nothing stop the American bitch? Third tore through stomach, ripping out the rear of her spine. The fourth shredded her right lung. She began to fall.

Goggle status light flashed green. No authorized users remained here. Command had reverted to Gail in Auxiliary Control.

Sandra's last conscious thoughts, a mosaic of memories, tessera melted from

old dreams:

Telling erstwhile Phoenix Guides that two simultaneous kill shots two-handed at two different moving targets was impossible,

laughing at Star Commando Jill doing same

silent everlost laughter never to laugh again at the irony doing it twice in a row after becoming dead.

Her body skidded off the table and rolled out of Mirabeau's line of sight.

Major Vincennes kicked pistols from Sandra's limp hands. "Dead," he pronounced.

In Auxiliary Control, status lights flared green. Gail stabbed at switches, dropping suppression screens and depowering force fields. Outside the base, the screens shielding the EU Landing Fleet began to fade. She grabbed at the emergency chaos gate dump, throwing all her weight at the mechanical switch. It dropped to the floor, Gail falling hard across it. Her breath whooshed out of her. Across the complex, primary power sources began their irreversible shut-down cycle.

The drawbridge suddenly dropped across the isolation gap. "Follow me!" screamed Karen. She'd heard the shots, far too many, some not from an American reaction pistol. Sandra needed her help.

"My God!" Vincennes pointed at the status displays. The entire PennYork defense center was turning itself off.

Mirabeau tapped at controls. The Americans had shut him out of their systems. It would take hours to restore the silenced machinery, hours his program lacked.

"Merde!" echoed Admiral Mirabeau.

"Nothing we can do. Run for it! Corridor Three to the emergency pinnace launch. Flee to the Universe Station. Out! Out! Out!" he shouted. He herded his survivors at the corridor. Wristcomp confirmed the rest of his men were dead. All too soon, this center would be blown to kingdom come, giving them a funeral pyre beyond all imagination. He was too busy screaming at his men to hear steps behind him.

He had not quite reached the corridor exit when Karen shot him, a half clip at full automatic. He was still conscious when she jumped to the table top, slid without quite falling on the blood coated plastic, and emptied another two magazines down straight, featureless Corridor Three. Major Vincennes and his men, wounded and dying, fell screaming to the deck.

Where was Sandra? wondered Karen. A look over the further edge of the table... for the rest of her life, Karen would understand why pre-Incursion women fainted at the sight of blood. "Medic..." she strangled on her whispering voice. "Medic!" she shouted.

Chandra sprinted into the room, kit popping open, servile making its fast autodiagnosis. Three EU citizens. Dead, multiple headshots each. One EU officer, dead, broken neck from kick... EU Officer, dead. EU officer, incapacitated. Girl Guide, unhurt. Six Coast Defence Artillery Officers, Dead. MinuteGirl, total destruction of chest cavity. Spine severed....

TO BE CONTINUED IN THE END

In other news, my campaign to run for National Chair of the Libertarian Party let me finish second. This Shining Sea, my previous novel, which had been available in .pdf format, is now also available in Palm Pilot format from Third Millennium Publications, <http://3mpub.com>.

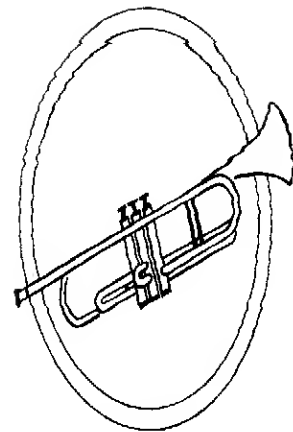
I am now working on and off on sections of Minutegrrrrls and sections of The One World.

2000 JULY

True Magick

#19

Copyright 2000
Michael A. Lavoie
20 White Plains Drive
Nashua, NH 03062
MLavoie735@aol.com



"I call myself a writer, but I never get paid," -- Jude Cole

Introduction to Issue 19

I want to begin by apologizing for my sporadic appearance as of late. I am hoping that I will be a more regular contributor in the future. It will take discipline and serious effort on my part to take the time to write. The new computer I recently bought should also help, as having a functional CD drive will allow me to play the music that helps me focus my concentration. Also, I now have access to my extensive collection of clip art which will improve the look of zine.

As for the issue at hand, this time around I will have few or no reviews. I have so much stuff to get through that I haven't been able to focus on any one item in enough depth to give it a fair review. There is some fantasy fiction that I'd like to mention. It's a very unusual trilogy by a new author that is definitely worth a read.

The topics for *IR* #40 are, as usual, interesting and worth writing about. The clash of roleplaying styles is something that probably happens to most players at one time or another. I don't know if my take on the subject will be of much interest to anyone but I figure I'll have a go at it anyway. As for breaking the suspension of disbelief, that is almost impossible to avoid in a roleplaying game. My group is notorious for getting off track and having to refocus on the game at hand. I'll scribble a few words on this topic as well.

Finally, I'll be writing about some recent events in my campaign. The heroes don't always succeed, and their failures can be entertaining and instructive. In future issues I'll be covering a plotline in which failure would result in the end of the game world; at this point the outcome is uncertain. Let us hope that Our Heroes have learned from their mistakes ...

This Issue's Topics

When styles collide

It happens in almost every game at one time or another. One or more players (or perhaps even the GM!) finds that the campaign has taken a wrong turn. Suddenly things are not what the player(s) wanted, or the game is no longer the one they thought they were playing. Perhaps one or more new players have joined the campaign. Maybe the GM has bought a new supplement that has encouraged him to change the campaign's focus. It could be that one of the players has taken a minor plotline and run with it, forcing the other players and the GM to adapt their plans to keep up. Whatever the reason, there is a clash of styles.

This can be very difficult to deal with, but it's certainly not an insurmountable obstacle. The *Players' Guide* for AEG's estimable *7th Sea* game contains some basic guidelines for dealing with this very situation. They are quite cogent and worth reading; I won't repeat them here, but I do urge those who have not yet read that book to at least pick it up in their local game store and start reading on page 237 ...

As a GM faced with players who have differing styles, I have had to deal with this problem extensively. There are those in my group who crave action, while others prefer to roleplay in more depth. Some like to talk their way through obstacles, others like to think a way around them, and still others prefer to cut a swath through them. Juggling all of these is perhaps the GM's greatest challenge. It's a fine line, the game master's equivalent of walking a tightrope (and most often there's no net to catch one's fall).

The obvious answer is to try to include challenges for all types of players to face. Finding the right blend is the tough part. If the group is made up of reasonable people, then the task is easier. Those who prefer to fight will grin and bear it while the cleric talks endlessly with the scholar who can provide the party with the clues they need to move on. Later, when a battle with the forces of evil breaks out, the roleplayers will grit their teeth and pitch in as best they can.

In a perfect world, at least, that's how it works. (More often than not, it works that way in my game). However, as we all know, the world is not perfect and sometimes a player will be simply unable to reconcile his style with that of the group. That is where I run into problems; I encourage the other players to help the recalcitrant player mesh with the group but have no magic, all-inclusive solution to fix things. Sometimes one just has to accept the incompatibility and move on, as recently happened in my campaign. We were unable to give an action-loving player what he needed in the game and he bowed out gracefully (after giving the rest of us one hugely entertaining night in an effort to spark the other players to action. I'll have to write that one up eventually!).

Breaking the Suspension of Disbelief

This particular subject is something I have great difficulty with. The main problem is that our group is very easily distracted. We get sidetracked at the drop of a hat, breaking out of the game to discuss just about any subject one might imagine. This of course shatters the fantasy and forces us to struggle to get back into the game and resume suspending disbelief. If anyone has an answer for this, I'll be glad to read it because I am just about out of ideas!

There are other ways to ruin things. I've been guilty from time to time of giving inappropriate names to NPCs, for example. Nothing throws the suspension of disbelief aside like having the berserker confronting the heroes introduce himself as Fred. Silly or incongruous names have a way of doing that and should, of course, be avoided at all costs. Should the GM fall into this trap, one has to either rush things along so that the silliness is left behind and forgotten, or try to make the best of things. In the case of Fred the berserker (alas, I drew a blank when it came to naming him!), I was

able to reach a believable compromise ... it turned out that the berserker's full name was Fredimanthus (a plausible name in my game world). He hated that name, and mentioning it in his presence was likely to send him into a berserk rage. Not the most elegant of solutions, but it did cover up my momentary mental block.

Glaring inconsistencies in the game world can also cause players to lose their way. I've been reasonably successful in avoiding these over the years, or so I hope anyway. The overused phrase, "It's magic!" can cover some inconsistencies, but if one does that sort of thing too often one's players find it hard to get into their characters and lose the ability to buy into the GM's story. It's hard to care about what happens in a world where things change from one game session to the next.

Unrealism is another problem. The classic dungeon crawl of *D&D's* early days comes to mind. What do all the monsters in that labyrinth eat? Where do they get water? Where do they ... er ... eliminate their wastes? Why don't the stronger ones kill the weaker ones and take over the whole place? And on and on ... and that's not even considering the ten storm giants in the 10 by 10 foot room! It seems silly now, but one wonders how players ever got past that kind of thing to find enjoyment in the game.

So many little things can pull players out of the game world and deposit them back in the mundane world that it's rather amazing that we are able to suspend disbelief enough to get any roleplaying done! Fortunately, in my experience most players are willing to cut a little slack and overlook all but the most egregious of transgressions. As with just about any problems, reasonable talking things out in a calm, cool manner usually leads to a mutually agreeable solution. Then it's time to get back into character and find out what lurks around the next corner ... hopefully it's not a berserker named Fred!





Games, Books, & Stuff

One Man's Opinions



The Black Jewels Trilogy by Anne Bishop

- *Daughter of the Blood* ROC, 1998
- *Heir to the Shadows* ROC, 1999
- *Queen of the Darkness* ROC, 2000

I have heard the lament in several corners lately that there is little truly original work being done in the field of fantasy fiction. To some extent, that is true. The genre is littered with Tolkien clones and wannabes, endless streams of novels based on movies and game worlds, and interminable series of equally interminable novels. This latter branch at least has some variety, from Robert Jordan's well-written but overwrought *Wheel of Time* novels to Terry Goodkind's interesting but not-quite-so-well-written series about Richard Rahl and the Sword of Truth. Surveying the racks of fantasy fiction at the local bookstore can be a pretty depressing experience to the connoisseur of the genre.

Every once in a while, however, a new writer appears with a new voice and a fresh perspective on the genre's well-established cliches. Such is the case with Anne Bishop. Her first three novels are like a breath of fresh air in a stuffy room. Given the aforementioned flood of routine drivel in the field it is far too easy for a new writer to get lost in the shuffle. I truly hope that this is not the fate in store for Ms Bishop and these wonderful books.

The Black Jewels Trilogy is like nothing else I have ever read. Anne Bishop combines fantasy, romance, and horror into a concoction that is absolutely unique. She also turns the fantasy genre's conventions on their ears, so one can check one's preconceptions at the door when delving into these books. Her world is extremely dark and savage. There are characters here who could teach Caligula a thing or two about decadence, and even the nominal heroes have extremely dark sides. The books are rife with bloody murders, and more: rape, incest, pedophilia, and other equally unsavory things crop up. Getting through some of the darker stuff requires a strong stomach, but the payoff is definitely worth the effort.

The story centers around Jaenelle Angelline, the heroine who is all the things in the books' titles, and much more beside. She is but seven years old at the beginning of *Daughter of the Blood*, the fulfillment of a centuries-old prophecy but still extremely vulnerable. Despite obvious talents in sorcery, she is unable to perform even the simplest spells that the lowliest hedge wizards can use. Those who recognize her potential struggle to control her, or to protect her from those who would do her harm.

The main action revolves around Jaenelle and the two factions who battle over her. The decadent matriarchy that rules the world wants her either dead or under their control, while the group led by Saetan SaDiablo, High Lord of Hell, wants to nurture her growth so that she can become Witch, the ultimate mage who can erase the taint that has contaminated those of the Blood (the Blood is the generic term for all of those who have the ability to use sorcery). Among this latter group are Saetan's sons, Lucivar (who pledged himself to defend Jaenelle) and Daemon (who feels that he was born to be Witch's consort and lover).

The jewels referred to in the trilogy's title are powerful tools for sorcery. Each mage earns a jewel to use as a focus and storage receptacle for his or her power; the darker the jewel the more powerful the mage. Saetan and Daemon are the only wearers of the Black, until Jaenelle arrives.

The books are wonderfully written and the story is compelling. It's nice to see a fantasy where black is the color of good and the darkness is a thing to be worshipped! Also, any trilogy where the most sympathetic character is named Saetan has got my attention, if only for the reversal of the hoary cliches of the fantasy genre.

The trilogy's flaws are minor. The casual brutality of which even the heroes are capable makes them a bit hard to like at times. Much of the tension in the second book comes from two characters believing transparent lies from known liars. Finally, the villains are occasionally exceedingly dense. In the end, this is a series not to be missed. Grade: A+

When the Heroes Take a Fall

Longtime readers of *Interregnum* and this zine will remember the campaign reports that were a regular feature of *True Magick* before the Great Hiatus. I wrote extensively about the adventures of the Heroes of Tuos, the current group of PCs in my long-running AD&D campaign. At some point in the future I hope to return to that narrative. However, I would like to skip ahead from the point at which I had left off (not that any reader would remember where that was, all those years ago ...) to some very recent events in the game. The story that I am about to relate began as a throw-away side plot, far removed from the campaign's overall storyline, but took on a life of its own. Eventually it resulted in the Heroes' most conspicuous failure. As such, I think it worth reporting here, in the hope that readers might learn from the Heroes' mistakes.

The PCs were at home, between major quests, and were taking some time to catch up on personal business. Specifically, there were weddings for two of them. The first of these, the marriage of Canan Bordeaux (a mage who joined the Heroes after the period covered by earlier reports in these pages) to Princess Katherine Tuos of Avathar, had its own complications. As these were related to the main plot of the campaign I will save them for their proper place in the timeline and not go into them here. Two weeks later, Countess Aislin Sindar (one of the original PCs of the Tuos campaign) was scheduled to wed Roderick Waterson, former seneschal at the Royal Palace in the city of Tuos.

The Heroes (save Canan, who was on his honeymoon) accompanied Aislin to her homeland for her wedding. As most of them had nothing to do with the ceremony, they became bored (always a dangerous situation!) and went looking for something to do. At the small town of Carlsberg near Castle Sindar, they stumbled onto a mystery.

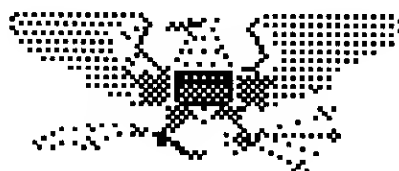
I'll digress here to explain the genesis of what they found. Knowing I'd probably need something on the spur of the moment, I had brought along with me an old TSR accessory called *City Sites*. This book includes a number of typical establishments that one might expect to find in a fantasy city, as well as links to tie them together. As the Heroes (less Canan and Aislin) entered the town, I flipped through the book

looking for a likely site for them to find. What caught my eye was an inn called The Cracked Mug, owned by a wealthy retired adventurer who was well-liked in the community. He also happened to be a vampire who had been a mage specializing in illusions, two facts which were unknown to the other residents of the town. This opened up so many possibilities that I had to use it.

Another newcomer to the Heroes since my last report is Sergeant Wayne Johns, a long-time mercenary who gave up the life of a sell-sword to take up adventuring at the tender age of 46 (how many AD&D players would start a 1st-level ranger PC at that age? But I digress ...). One of the running jokes in the campaign is that everyone knows the Sarge. It's kind of like in the TV show *Cheers* when the character Norm enters the bar and everyone calls out his name, except that this happens to Sarge wherever he goes. He's fought for and/or against just about everyone in his career and nobody ever forgets him. So when the Heroes entered The Cracked Mug for the first time, no one was surprised when the bartender called out, "Sarge!"

In the ensuing conversation, the barkeep (a former warrior hired by the vampire illusionist to manage the tavern) mentioned that a former associate of Sarge's had passed through Carlsberg not long ago. He was bringing a group of merces to try to hire on as guards for the upcoming wedding. This mercenary rented a couple of rooms at the Mug, then went off to a local gambling parlor with Koslowe, the "upstanding and honorable" tavern owner. He never came back.

This of course piqued the Heroes' interest. They immediately began making inquiries throughout the town, unearthing no more data on Sarge's missing buddy. However, they did find a rather disturbing pattern of disappearances and sudden illnesses that immediately led them to suspect a vampire. Their



investigations centered around two places: a house at the edge of town that was said to be haunted, and the town square. In the latter place, criminals confined overnight to the stocks for minor offenses tended to develop a strange wasting disease, but the former sounded like a prime spot for investigation so the Heroes decided to look into the haunted house.

This once-stately but now run-down home was formerly owned by a mage who used to conduct his experiments and researches there. One day he and his family (a wife and daughter) simply disappeared. They have not been heard from since. Soon after, neighbors reported weird lights and sounds at the house. Occasionally someone would enter the house. More often than not, that person would never be seen again. The house had gone untenanted ever since, a period of some 15 years.

This sounded like prime vampire territory, so the Heroes secured permission from the Mayor to enter the house and deal with whatever lay within. They found some nasty undead guardians left behind by the former owner. After disposing of these monsters, the Heroes searched the house from top to bottom. They found the mage's secret laboratory, a treasure trove of magical supplies left behind in his hasty departure. In the cellar they found a coffin. Correctly deducing that this was a "spare" for the vampire (since any wise bloodsucker has several bolt holes in case one is discovered), the Heroes turned their attention to the stocks.

They had to wait a day or two for a miscreant to be confined to the stocks for the evening. Eventually a local warrior got drunk and performed some petty acts of vandalism, earning a night in the stocks for his efforts. The Heroes staked out the square, stationing party members in various spots around the place so that they could monitor all possible avenues of approach. Koslowe (the vampire) came to feed, and of course saw that his prey was not alone. In order to distract the Heroes, he cast an illusion of a seductive female vampire. While he hid invisibly nearby, this apparition (accompanied by some very real bats and a wolf) strolled up to the square and proceeded to act exceedingly vampiric. Koslowe's intent was to lure the PCs away so that he could dine. He was successful, wildly so in that they also bought into the illusion.

They fell for it hook, line, and sinker. Koslowe had



shown them just what they wanted to see, and they never questioned the reality of the female vampire. One of the Heroes remembered seeing some portraits at the haunted house, so they made another trip to the place to check things out. Upon viewing the dusty artwork, they decided that the young daughter of the vanished mage would be just about the right age to be the vampire that they had seen. They also decided that the young girl in the portraits could very well have grown up to become that vampire.

Koslowe found this all very entertaining. The illusion was, in fact, a rendering of the vampire that had cursed him, ending his adventuring career many years ago. The "resemblance" between the girl in the portraits and the vampire was purely coincidental (and largely in the imaginations of the PCs). Needless to say, the real vampire played this to the hilt and the illusion made several appearances over the ensuing days.

The Heroes did manage to frustrate Koslowe despite the fact that they were looking for the wrong vampire. They denied him a meal or two from the stocks, and uncovered and destroyed two more of his coffins. At one point they fought the illusion, "damaged" her, and pursued her to the residence of a shopkeeper who turned out to be innocent of any wrongdoing, vampiric or otherwise. This was very aggravating to Our Heroes, who wanted to stake this lady bloodsucker in the worst way.

Koslowe remained unsuspected. His hole card was his assistant, a doppelganger that assumed Koslowe's form during the day so that the Cracked Mug's owner could be seen going about in daylight. This possibility never occurred to the Heroes, so convinced were they of the female vampire's reality. Their searching continued beyond Aislin's wedding, and Canan rejoined the group while Aislin was on her honeymoon.

Like a fighter swinging wildly in the dark, the Heroes succeeded in landing a few blows against the

opponent. Despite themselves, they were closing in on their quarry. Koslowe realized that it was only a matter of time before they stumbled on the truth. He began to prepare for his departure.

As they always seem to do when stumped, the Heroes turned to the sewers. A trip through Carlsberg's sewers was actually profitable; they found some secret passages leading from the Cracked Mug to various exit points throughout town, terminating in an outlet near the river alongside which the town was situated. Comprehension was slow in coming, but the PCs finally realized that the Cracked Mug, the starting point for the whole affair, was the place they should have been investigating all along.

They mounted a raid on the place, first obtaining a



writ from the Mayor allowing them to search the inn. A continuing theme of the adventure was that the residents of Carlsberg refused to believe that a vampire resided in their midst. The clumsy attempts of the PCs to persuade them otherwise failed to convince them otherwise for a long time; of course, the fact that the vampire that the Heroes sought didn't exist was not helpful to their case. Eventually they uncovered enough evidence to persuade the town of the vampire's existence (the coffins in the sewers helped here), and the Heroes were deputized to lead the Great Vampire Hunt.

By the time that they broke into Koslowe's apartment upstairs at The Cracked Mug, the vampire was long gone. Due to some fancy shapeshifting by his doppelganger henchman, he managed to escape unsuspected. In his hasty departure, he was unable to carry off all of his spellbooks. Our Heroes found these books of illusionist spells hidden in his rooms, and the truth finally began to dawn on them.

They returned to the sewers with a patrol of town guardsmen led by a sergeant. Also, they recruited a priestess at the local temple to help them deal with the undead monster and split up the party to search

near the residential district near the home of the shopkeeper who had been framed earlier.

Even at this point, there still remained a chance that the Heroes could have pulled off a successful capture of the vampire. Alas, Koslowe remained two steps ahead of them. They followed the wrong lead, going through the sewers to their exit at the river and then going down the river to see where that trail led. They found a smuggler's cave, where Koslowe was stashing stolen food and drink to supply his inn (explaining how he was able to make a profit despite very low prices). An old coffin lay there, and the portion of the party that had followed this trail decided to stake out this place overnight to see if the vampire might return. They sent for the remainder of the group.

This proved to be a fatal mistake. While Our Heroes lurked at the cave, Koslowe and his henchman returned to Carlsberg to deal with the searchers. The doppelganger picked off the town guardsmen one by one, taking on the form of the first one that he killed and luring the rest of them to their deaths. He captured the sergeant and brought him to Koslowe, who then had a bite to eat and inducting the man into the realm of the undead. Koslowe himself found the priestess and charmed her to be his servant ... and lover.

The Heroes returned to town the next day, having found nothing at the cave. Only then did they learn the extent of their failure. They found ten guardsmen slaughtered, their heads missing. Both the sergeant (the guard sergeant, not Sergeant Wayne Johns the PC) and the priestess were missing. And the vampire had escaped, for even though the Heroes set out upon his actual trail it was too late.

Sadder, but hopefully wiser, the Heroes prepared to return to Tuos. This was when the priestess returned to taunt them with a message from Koslowe, who wanted them to know of her fate. Also, the vampire sergeant returned to attack the PCs. They were able to put him out of his misery, so their scorecard did finally include one dead vampire.

What made this sweet for me as a GM was that the players were boasting early on in the affair that they knew exactly what was going on. Perhaps now they realize that my mysteries aren't always quite so easy to figure out... and they now know the price of hubris,

COMMENTS ON IR #39

I've missed too many issues to comment on everything that's been written since my last appearance in these hallowed pages. Therefore, I will confine my comments to the most recent issue.

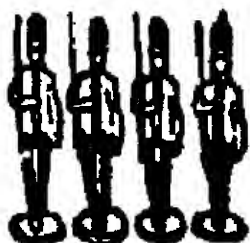
A very interesting cover for this issue! Nice juxtaposition of objects, and a fitting cover for George Phillies' book. Well done all around!

Words on the Wing #10

- ☐ Thanks for the review on *Furry Pirates*. That title sounds like something that I'd be very interested in, but after reading your review I think I'll give it a miss. I am no fan of overly complex rules systems. One wonders why the system even has rules for first-level characters if the designers recommend starting players at 6th level. Personally, I enjoy the challenge of surviving the early levels.
- ☐ Re: the excerpt from "Watching the Watchers." Not bad for a first effort ... very impressive, in fact.

The Real McCoy

- ☐ Moving house ... what a wonderful endeavor! We still have boxes and boxes of stuff around the house from my wife's move here from Minnesota last year ...
- ☐ Verrrrrry interrrrrrrresting story! Your file name is incorrect, I must say, for there is indeed a plot therein. It is a most interesting plot indeed! Nicely done.
- ☐ I must admit that I found things slow going at first, what with the numerical designations and the non-gender-specific pronouns. I have never liked the latter, and I was most relieved to learn that there was a very valid reason for your using them in the story.



The Sign of the Dancing Priestess #10

- ☐ Sorry to hear that you will be so busy. Your work will be missed from these pages. Hurry back!
- ☐ re: your comments to David Hoberman about your proposed superhero story. Should you ever find yourself with time on your hands (a remote possibility, I know!) I wish you would try to write some if. It all sounds fascinating, and I am no fan of the genre.

Refugee

- ☐ Sorry, George, but I have no comments at this time on *Minutegrrrls*. I have as yet been unable to get into the story, and I really cannot explain why. I will make an effort in the near future to rectify that situation.

The Swashbuckling Mage Rides Again #10

- ☐ Thanks for stepping up to the plate while Kiralee is occupied with Real Life! It's great to have someone who is willing and able to fill in. Given your normally considerable contributions to this APA, one wonders how you can find the time ... but one is very grateful nonetheless!
- ☐ I had wondered what you would write on house rules, given that you have designed your own system. As might be expected, your rules are well-thought-out and useful.
- ☐ A related question. Do you run your system as written, or do you find yourself making up the occasional house rule? If so, do these find their way into the game system at some point?

The Chrome Libram

- ☐ Great article on house rules. As a longtime AD&D GM (who uses his own version of the magic system, among other house rules), I was intrigued by your changes. The cosmology is also fascinating.
- ☐ I am sad to see you leave *IR*. You have been one of my favorite contributors over the years and I will miss you. So will the editors, since you could always be counted on to produce a lengthy, well-written zine. Good luck!

Do You Know What Time It Is?

Written By: Mark Kibbe from Basement Games

"The Cavasha attacks. It's tentacles slither toward you, pulling the monster's grotesque humanoid features closer. Suddenly, it's solid white eyes flash creating a blinding light." Looking toward Scott I say, "Make a Saving Throw or else go blind."

Carefully Scott picks up his die and rubs it in the palm of his hands. His eyes examine his base Saving Throw, 13+. Tossing the die, it bounces off the Referee Screen, rolls across his book, and lands on the table as a 6. He failed and I pronounced sentence.

"Sorry Scott, your character is blind, permanently."

The group immediately burst into a frenzied commotion. Bewildered questions about how to fight such a creature emerged. Sympathy for Scott's character, but more importantly the loss of the group's powerful fighter, also became topic of conversation. I allowed them to continue their debate; we were all unaware of the heavy footfalls that were marching down the stairs from above. The footfalls that would enter the basement and pronounce sentence on us.

"Mark Frederick Kibbe", the voice bellowed from the top of the stairs. It was my dad, awoken from his slumber by the ruckus of teenagers.

"Yes", I replied, motioning for everyone to be silent.

"Do you know what time it is?"

It was the phrase that we had heard a hundred times, a phrase that meant it was very early in the morning. With a quick glance I looked at the digital clock that sat on the shelf. The glowing red letters read **3:17 AM**. I winced. "Sorry," I replied again, "we'll try to keep it down."

"Your mother and I are trying to sleep," the tired voice grumbled through fatigue, "don't you have school tomorrow?"

"It's Christmas dad; we're off from school."

With a dazed growl he turned and marched back upstairs. We listened to the heavy footfalls ascend the two flights and fade away. Instantly the voices resumed their frenzied debate.

That was one of the rituals in the Kibbe's basement, and it continued for years. I would be scolded in the morning, or most likely the afternoon when I awoke. But it was worth any punishment.

Having grown older, we no longer play in the basement, or awaken my parents in the wee hours of the morning. Instead, we game in a fifth floor apartment. I must admit that I miss the fatherly shouts and the late-night gaming sessions in my parents' house. Being yelled at by neighbors just isn't the same.



The Real McCoy

Copyright © 2000 by Elizabeth McCoy

(emccoy@nh.ultranet.com) <http://www.io.com/~arcangel>

Permission granted to copy this material as needed to include in
Interregnum #40

(Layout and art selections are to be blamed on Joseph Teller)

Some more of my fiction. This one is, well, "Unar Mainstream." If Unars had mainstream magazines, or romance ones, this is what this would be in. I was experimenting with a social order that humans would find slightly odd at best, and horribly incestuous at worst. (In other words, anyone who thinks that this is a model for *human* children is a raving, and likely dangerous, loon.)

It at least has something resembling a plot, even if it is "slice of life" in a big way.

Snips and Snails

By Elizabeth McCoy

[Footnote: Unars are based on a concept by John Moore, but I really doubt he'd recognize them by now.]

Grumbling slightly to himself, Haatha Chaas'-Eighth put out the platter of meat-scrap and settled down to wait.

It didn't take long -- perhaps half an hour -- before his quarry arrived: about fifteen hatchlings, barely coming up to Haatha's digigrade ankles. They swarmed over the meat-scrap, snapping and hissing at each other as they gorged.

The Unar poet sighed and waded into the mass of them, thick boots stopping their attempted attacks on his feet, equally tough gloves allowing him to pick them up and wrap the tagging collars around their tiny necks. He had to hold his tail up high, since he'd forgotten to wrap it. Their baby-teeth wouldn't get through his scales, but they could probably pinch something fierce.

Curse whoever clutched on Chaas-property anyway, he thought as he shook off one who'd buried its teeth in his glove. *Little trash-eating creatures. At least Sahna's School will come and pick them up if they're tagged.*

He made a grab for the last one, a runty, ugly-gray, scrawny thing, but it ducked, dodged, and ran out between his legs. By the time he turned around, the last hatchling had vanished into the night. *And curse my adult slowness*, Haatha sighed. It had been a long time since he'd been an immature neuter, built for speed and hunting over sentience, but he still remembered scraps of his pre-sentient youth.

"At least I got the rest of you vermin," he told the remaining hatchlings, who were still squabbling over meat scraps. One of them hissed at him, and he wrinkled his muzzle back for a moment before going back inside.

*

The next evening, after Sahna's apprentices had hunted down the collared hatchlings, there were still three of the little creatures who came to the bowl of scraps. This time Haatha had remembered to wrap his tail, and he grabbed for the scrawny gray one first. Instead of trying to run under his lowered tail, it grabbed the largest meat-scrap and *leaped* over his hands, again escaping into the night.

The other two weren't so wary -- their sibling's departure left more meat for them, so they stayed and barely noticed when he slipped the collars over their heads.

He waited another hour for the last one to get back, and caught another runt who came in after the first pair had crept away with taut bellies, but the maverick hatchling didn't show up. Finally, with legs aching from his mimicry of a hunting crouch, Haatha went back inside and shed his tough hatchling-catching clothing.

A few hours later, after he'd done some work on "The Beauty of Calcium Triphosphate (working title)," he happened to hear a strange scraping noise. He glanced out the window. The little gray runt was licking the scrap-bowl across the porch energetically.

*

The next morning, he called Sahna's School and asked if they wanted to send someone out for the last three, and what should he do about this wild runt?

They sent a group of apprentices for the collared hatchlings, and gave him a snare to catch the last one. "If you can't get close to it, you'll have to drug it or use a trap," one of the apprentices told him. "Drugging them is tricky -- can't be sure what its metabolism's like, so you might poison it. And if you have to use a trap, we don't want it. Feral ones are usually socially retarded, and the apprenticing statistics on them are poor."

The immature male went on to suggest a few places that could supply traps -- a third-rate School, a meat-company, and a disreputable family who would probably sell the hatchling for use in gladiatorial events.

Somewhat revolted by all the options, Haatha remembered to thank the apprentices when they left, with the last three hatchlings (save the gray runt) loaded into their hover-truck, their gray-green captives squabbling at each other through the bars of their respective cages.

*

That evening, he waited for two hours next to the plate of scraps, but the runtling didn't show. He went back inside to work on the poem -- he intended to dedicate it to his brother-apprentice, Rahsaas Chaas'-Fifth, for his nutritional work. The scraping noise of the plate being pushed around the porch distracted him, and he went out with the snare and last tracking-collar.

The gray runt snarled at him as he extended the snare towards its neck. It batted at the loop with one forepaw, then turned and fled.

Knowing it would be useless to wait for the creature outside, Haatha went back in until he heard the scraping noise again. Then he donned gloves and picked up the snare, and repeated the attempt. The hatchling, for its part, repeated the running away. When he next heard it pushing the plate around, he tried again, and the wretched thing darted away as soon as he opened the door.

He didn't hear it again that night, and finally went to sleep, but when he collected the plate in the morning, it had been licked clean.

*

He didn't hear it again the next night, either, and the meat-scraps were still gone, so he re-arranged his writing room so that he could look out the window.

The hatchling had returned, all right, but now it was holding the plate down with both tiny forepaws, preventing the dish from scraping along the stone of the porch.

Of course, it vanished itself when he opened the door.

Haatha resolved to call one of the trap-providers in the morning.

*

The trappers and trap-providers were uniformly business-like, except for the third-rate School, which was vague and gave the impression of great sloppiness. Haatha had a feeling that most of their business was from people who got their apprentices *very* early, so they could raise them

to sentence themselves. Either that, or the School was running a brothel on the side, and employing the "merchandise" as School-attendants after they matured.

None of them would deliver a trap to him, so he muttered and decided to let it go till he'd gotten "Calcium Triphosphate" dealt with.

*

"Interlocking interstices, bones and body, bright scales...." There was a banging from outside. He snarled and went to the window. The little rogue had toppled his trashcan, and was tearing the bags open, obviously annoyed that its meal wasn't waiting as it had been for the past five nights.

He opened the door, and the hatchling stayed long enough to rear up and hiss at him before dropping into a running crouch and dashing away. Muttering dire imprecations and threats of using a jaw-trap, Haatha cleaned up the mess, re-bagging the trash and making sure the lid was securely closed.

Much, much later, after he'd gone to bed, the can crashed over again, and there was trash all over his porch the next morning.

One of his apprentice brothers, Tassans Chaas'-Fourth the viral geneticist, showed up a day after that, with his brood of apprentices. Haatha counted eight, but it seemed more like eighty when the youngest three were running around.

"The newbies needed some running room," Tassans explained, lounging on the porch with Haatha and the other five apprentices. One of the mid-aged ones was keeping her eye on the youngest trio as they dashed about in the back yard, while the two eldest were rubbing Tassans' tail gently.

Tassans noticed Haatha's slightly overwhelmed look and flicked his tail in amusement. "You should get an apprentice, Haatha. It's not right that you're keeping your word-working to yourself. Besides, how else are you going to spread your genetic heritage around?"

Haatha thumped his own tail in a good-natured humor. "I can't afford an apprentice. I've got the land as our Matriarch's death-wishes, but I really only barely support myself. Besides, hatchlings are unmitigated trouble."

Tassans shook his head. "I see I'll have to buy you a mimic-hunter."

"What, and have it chewing up the furniture?" Haatha blew air out his nose in horror at the thought. "They're worse than hatchlings! At least hatchlings grow up and turn sentient."

Tassans was obviously working on something teasing when the youngest of the three newbies shrilled a hunt-cry.

"Wonder what they've caught?" he murmured, watching the trio fall into an chevron formation, with the youngest as the reverse point and her two sister-apprentices flanking.

Something skittered through the grass and the farther flanking-apprentice pounced with both hands.

"Pet," Tassans observed, then got to his feet hurriedly as his apprentice squealed in pain, flinging one of her hands out. Attached to that hand by its teeth was the little gray hatchling. At the apex of the arc, the runt let go and flew away. When it landed, there was a rapidly fading rustle.

The two unharmed apprentices bolted after the hatchling for a few seconds, caught by the instinct to chase even though they were well-fed, then came back to their sister-apprentice to sniff at her hand and lick at it gingerly.

The other five apprentices and Tassans himself got there quickly, too, and he craned his neck while his eldest apprentice checked the wound.

"Nothing bad, Patriarch," she reported. "Mostly just bruised, but it did break the skin a little."

Tassans nodded, and his tail settled into a relieved curl. "Good, my First. Go fetch the antiseptic while we get her onto the porch."

Tassans'-First nodded and waded out of the apprentice-cluster, loping past Haatha where he was standing, far enough away that the youngest three wouldn't get excited and react to him as a threat.

Tassans herded the cluster towards the porch with the help of the other two elder apprentices. As they passed Haatha, his apprentice-brother sighed. "You may be right, Haatha -- apprentices *are* trouble."

Haatha drew the corners of his mouth down. "Sorry about that -- I'd meant to tell you I had a feral hatchling running around. I didn't think it would be hanging so close to the house."

"No harm done -- she'll probably have forgotten all about it by the morning. I'll be glad when the trio stop presenting me with hatchlings or anything else they catch..."

His Second or Third apprentice (Haatha was having some trouble keeping those two straight, since their coloration and markings were virtually identical) waved her tail a little. "You said that was how Eighth apprentice-uncle Haatha was found, Patriarch! You said that you and Sixth apprentice-uncle Larsh were out hunting, and caught him!"

Haatha stared and Tassans looked rueful. "That's entirely different, my Third. Among other reasons, Haatha was very gentle and didn't bite either of us." As an aside to Haatha, he added, "My Third *will* remember every little bit of trivia I say and recite it back at inopportune times. You remember when she was reciting dirty political limericks to Matriarch Chaas..."

Haatha thumped his tail in amusement. "Who do you think taught her the limericks, Tassans?"

"That's it," his apprentice-brother mock grumbled. "Next clutch goes right on your doorstep."

"Don't you dare -- I'm already going to have to set up a live-trap for that wretched little creature who bit your..."

"Seventh," Tassans finished.

"Live trap?" Tassans'-Second looked around. "Can we have it?"

Haatha was about to ask whether she meant the trap or the hatchling when Tassans frowned at her. "Absolutely not!" Tassans exclaimed. "Eight apprentices at once is enough. You've already got three mimic-hunters at home, as well as the fish, the amphibians, and that off-world parakit thing!"

"Parakeet," the apprentice corrected sulkily.

"Matriarch to twenty when she grows up?" Haatha asked quietly, amused.

"More like thirty... I think she's going to start a School with her full-sister. Pity. I was hoping for more biosciences people. Then again, Matriarch Chaas couldn't figure out how you turned into a poet. It happens."

While the cluster were tending to their injured Seventh, Haatha looked out into the fields. A small gray hatchling looked back at him from a goodly distance. It hissed and vanished into the grass again.

After his brother had left, Haatha went for the live-trap cage. After due consideration, hovering in his aircar above his driveway, he decided that he couldn't bear to give the hatchling to either the meat-packaging company (he was almost sure that they were using hatchlings to hunt down any vermin, rather than putting the hatchlings into the packages, but there was that plausible doubt...), or to the off-world gladiatorial people. That left the third-rate School, but at least there was a chance that someone might want it there -- maybe a security-guard, or a military person.

When he got to the School, he found that it was, indeed, half-brothel. He landed the aircar and walked to the School's entrance, watched intently by at least a dozen anxious-looking female apprentices. An equal number of equally-anxious males scanned the sky for more aircars, having lost interest in Haatha as soon as he got out of his car.

Haatha wondered what was kinder -- to allow them to gender without giving them a stable Patriarch or Matriarch, or to keep them neuter and cull them humanely if they didn't get apprenticed.

The receptionist was a young adult female, sitting behind a desk. Behind and around her was a plastic wall where various neuters were visible -- a clutch of hatchlings eating and playing with motorized toys; a wall, and then a sleeping neuter who was probably not yet ready to bond; another wall, and a pair of sentient neuters studying a simple computer terminal; and finally an old neuter who was obviously in the final stages. The last one was hunched over a computer as well, while a terminal above it -- or, more properly, *hir* -- was displaying the tests and answers it/sie was working on. Sie glanced up occasionally, noticing Haatha and trying to work faster.

Haatha paused and looked at the statistics for a moment. They were only average, and the neuter wasn't that attractive, either. For a moment, he felt sorry for the neuter -- as Haatha had been Chaas' pet even before his apprenticing, he'd never faced the terror of full sentience in a dying neuter body.

He shuddered and turned to the receptionist. "Haatha Chaas'-Eighth. You said you'd provide live-traps?"

"About fifteen minutes," the female said as she turned to a comm. "Live-trap request, Sata."

Sata turned out to be one of the anxious female apprentices, and she stared at Haatha disconcertingly as she gave him the live-trap and written instructions. As he stared after her, the receptionist said, "Sata's not strongly bonded, if you're looking for an apprentice."

He blinked at the adult female for a second, then blew air out his nose. "N-no." Then he fled.

*

He got on the comm to Rahsaas Chaas'-Fifth later that evening.

"I'd never been to a School before, Rahsaas. I didn't know they were that horrible! They tried to sell me a female apprentice!"

"Pretty shabby, yes," his apprentice-brother agreed. "Not all Schools are like that, you know."

"I feel like I'm betraying the hatchling," Haatha mumbled, glancing at the live-trap that he hadn't set up yet.

Rahsaas shook his head. "Poets are strange. There are people who have perfectly good experiences in Schools, you know. I quite enjoyed it, myself. It was like having hundreds of apprentice-sibs, sometimes. Oh, it was stressful in the tests, when we were all competing for the attractive scores, but Naahas' School was very good at finding a neuter's talents."

Haatha managed a weak tail-thump. "Well, that place wasn't Naahas'. And I still feel... I don't know..."

"You need to drop off this little vermin of yours first," Rahsaas advised. "Then go back to Sahna's School -- they seemed reputable enough, sending their apprentices to gather the other hatchlings, right? Go back there and tell them you're looking for a quiet, well-behaved neuter with an aptitude for language and writing. You'll feel much better."

Haatha snorted. "I can't afford an apprentice right now."

"Don't be fuzzy-minded, Haatha. You can probably afford **one** apprentice. And if you're worried about getting one cheap, you could always take one of our apprentices' eggs."

"Mmmmh."

Rahsaas wrinkled his nose at Haatha in exasperation. "If you're *that* concerned over your little wildling, then keep her!"

"That vicious little thing?" Haatha was agast. "I don't think so!"

"Then stop worrying about it. Go work on your word-crafting. Write something about the hatchling or the School. That usually gets tension out of you."

"That's true," he sighed. "Thanks, Rahsaas."

*

It was three days later -- and he had to keep his trash inside at night all that time, as well -- before he had written enough about the School to bear to set up the trap.

He made sure the little buzzer on it was set to go off loudly enough that he could hear it even from his bedroom, then went back inside to work on the Calcium Triphosphate poem again.

He didn't hear the buzzer, but he did hear scraping. Perplexed, he looked out the window. The hatchling had stretched one forepaw into the cage and was tugging the dish of bait out. He had a sudden vision of the dish setting off the pressure sensor, and the runt getting its forepaw pinched -- or broken. Even a scare would probably ensure the hatchling avoided further traps.

Hurridly, he got up and opened the door. The hatchling actually did something useful and abandoned the scraps, darting away with its usual paranoia.

It would be a task to tame her -- it, Haatha corrected himself. I don't have the time.

He un-set the trap, then brought everything back inside while he secured the dish to the far end of the cage with cunningly arranged strings. "It probably won't even try," he muttered as he hauled it back outside again and reset it.

Despite his prediction, he waited quietly at the window, watching to see what the runt did.

After a while -- long enough for Haatha to start getting bored -- it showed up again. Carefully, with many wary glances at the door, the wildling crept up to the cage, sniffing around it, and even going so far as to poke its head inside, forepaws nearly on the pressure-sensor. However, it obviously didn't like the idea of creeping into a place with only one exit. Pulling away, the hatchling circled the trap, climbed onto it, and gnawed at the cage-wires. Haatha blinked and twitched his tail; he'd been sure that the little menace would fall for the door, but apparently it didn't trust the enclosed space.

It crawled off the cage and sat in front of the entrance, staring at the meat scraps as if they would remember their live state and come darting out. The meat did no such thing, and the runt actually whined for a moment before hissing maliciously at the cage. Then, with greatly offended dignity, the hatchling went to the back of the cage-trap and started pulling slivers of meat through the bars.

Haatha shoved his muzzle up against the window, boggled beyond description. It was actually using its forepaws as full hands. That had to be strange; he'd never heard of hatchlings doing that until they were a few years old and nearly ready to gender. Admittedly, the occasional hissing and chewing on the bars was hardly a mature reaction, but the accurate assessment of danger...

Maybe there was something to this little creature, the poet mused. *I have got to be crazy, he told himself. Even if I wanted her -- it -- I couldn't catch it! I'd have to hope it hung around long enough to seek me out when it was ready to gender, and some predator would probably eat it, and it certainly wouldn't be properly socialized...*

He sighed and rested his cheek against the window quietly, until the runt decided that it wasn't hungry enough to mess with any stupid meat-slivers anymore. With a final snippy snarl at the live-trap, the hatchling vanished into the darkness.

Haatha got up, sighed, and went outside yet again. "This is going to take a while," he muttered. Obviously, no matter *what* he decided, the hatchling had to be caught. And also obviously, it didn't trust him and his plots as far as it could fly on a three-gee world. Thoughtfully, he un-set the trap, leaving the door fixed open, and reached in to unfasten the dish. Then he went back inside.

The next morning, the dish was outside of the cage. Chuckling slightly in his throat, Haatha refilled the dish and set it back inside.

It took nearly three tendays before he felt it was safe to fasten the dish back down again -- and he'd had to pay for the trap. By that time, he felt the expense was worth it for the (probably childish) thrill of outsmarting the hatchling. He'd watched as the little creature gradually lost its paranoia around the cage, pulling the dish only half-way out before burying its face in scraps.

Now he watched as, hissing and growling in displeasure, the runt crawled fully inside the cage and started eating. It was hard not to rush out and try to block the cage-door with something, but he controlled the impulse.

After another three days, he nerved himself and armed the trap again. And that evening, while he carefully kept away from the window, he heard the trap's alarming capture buzzer.

This time Haatha did race outside, to watch in alarm and near-awe as the runt flung itself about the inside of the cage with enough vehemence that he would not have been surprised at some final escape through an unsuspected weak spot -- after all, the hatchling had chewed on the cage-bars enough...

It didn't work, despite the hatchling's best physical efforts and ear-rending complaints. Haatha crouched down and waited for its furious tantrum to die down.

Eventually the gray-green creature collapsed in the middle of the cage, surrounded by meat scraps, and just panted. It glared at him with something between hatred and hurt feelings at his betrayal. He winced and tried to tell himself that he was imagining things, and the proto-sentient Unar was probably only unhappy and tired, and would likely forget about it entirely. *In a few years...*

He got up and went over to the cage, carefully picking it up by the handle. The hatchling closed its eyes and went limp, but its hind-toes twitched a little.

"You're not making a break for it when I open the door," he told it.

It didn't respond, and for a brief, mad moment, Haatha considered opening the cage and letting it run free again. Better sense caught up with him before he tried it, though, and he brought the cage inside the house.

Crouching down again, Haatha realized that the moment of decision was on him. The house had a perfectly good hatchling-run; Matriarch Chaas had preferred to raise her apprentices from very young, as she got older. On the other hand, apprentices really were a bit of work, and this hatchling would probably never be very attractive, not to mention it had a lousy attitude...

"What am I going to do with you?" he asked it.

It watched him through barely-open eyes.

"I'm serious. Do you *want* to stay with me?" It didn't seem to react, so he put his hand nearer the cage. Maybe it would be less alarmed if it got used to his scent.

"I suppose you could -- I mean, I could hand you off to one of my apprentice-brothers when you got a little tamer, so it wouldn't be like you'd be *my* apprentice." There was still no reaction from it, so he actually put his hand against the cage, then stroked the hatchling's tailtip with one finger.

For a moment, the runt tolerated that, and Haatha felt a most unreasonable glow of... pride, perhaps, or patriarchal affection. Then the horrid little creature turned around, almost blindingly fast, and tried to sink its teeth into his finger. He barely pulled away in time, and examined the scratches on his scales carefully, corners of his mouth pulling down.

"Be that way," he muttered, standing and walking away from the cage. "I'll drop you off at some School in the morning."

*

In the morning, Haatha slunk back downstairs, sure that he'd been a fool to leave a hatchling in the cage all night with no litterbox.

The runt was curled up in a corner of the cage. When he got near, it uncurled itself and launched itself at him, coming up against the bars and clinging -- and all the while scolding him with shrill pre-sentient chatter.

If I don't let it use a litterbox, Haatha sighed to himself, it will probably make an exceeding mess and fling it through the cage while it's in my car, and then I would have to clean that up.

Blowing air out his nose and lashing his own tailtip, he picked the trap up and went to the hatchling-run. Once he was past the double-door "airlock," he opened the cage door.

As he'd predicted, the hatchling was out at near-warp speeds, quickly finding one of the old "dens" and hiding in it with much hissing and growling.

Haatha raised his hands and muzzle to the sky. "Fine! I'll leave so you can relieve yourself!" And he stomped out.

*

I was right, he said to himself much later that day, watching a pair of paranoid eyes -- all that the runt would let him see of it. *There's no way I'm getting it back in the cage. I'm committed to socializing it enough to hand her to someone else without losing my hand...*

With much internal grousing, Haatha started outlining his Tame The Runt program. For starters, he'd have to get a stool in the hatchling-run, so he could get her used to eating while he was around... He thumped his tail on the ground hard. *I have **got** to stop thinking of it as female!*

It was another three ten-days before the hatchling stopped hiding in dens whenever he appeared in the airlock. He'd presented his poem, now titled, "Scalebright," to Rahsaas, who had been pleased enough to place it in the personal data section of his public records. Over dinner in Rahsaas' city apartment, Haatha confided that he'd let the hatchling escape in the apprentice run.

"...and even now," he concluded morosely, "it's probably leaving 'accidents' in front of the lock-door, and whimpering because it ate two days' worth of food in a few hours."

"And you feel guilty about it," Rahsaas commented blandly, handing off his empty plate to a quiet apprentice.

Haatha sighed and picked at the remaining scraps on his own plate. Rahsaas' eldest tilted her head, watching him, then took the single plate away to be cleaned. Rahsaas' Second and Third continued to crouch nearby, alert to any requests from their Patriarch. Haatha thought it was entirely unfair that he was the only apprentice-brother in his family to *not* have any apprentices of his own. He'd used to see the other solitaires, when he went into the city; now all he saw were apprentices in singles, duos, triads, or packs... "I feel guilty about it," he finally admitted.

"Well, you say she's intelligent. Perhaps you should try selling her to the military. They might have a use for hyperactive paranoids. The discipline might settle her down."

Haatha gave his apprentice-brother a pained look. "Do you have to keep calling h--it a 'she'? If I give it away, she -- *it!* -- might end up with a Matriarch instead. It won't even be a sie for another few years."

Rahsaas rested his muzzle on his hands, elbows on the table and tail twitching with amusement -- Haatha could hear the little thumps, and Rahsaas'-Third was looking very intently in that direction.

"It isn't funny," he muttered darkly.

"On the contrary," Rahsaas told him. "You've gotten to like the little wretch. It's stubborn and clever, just like you, but with a bad attitude. You want to tame it, and watch it turn into a beautiful little female, the envy of all your apprentice-brothers, loyal and intelligent."

Haatha blew air out his nose and clapped his hands over his forehead. "All right, all right, I'd love to tame her and have all that happen. But how likely is it?" He raised his head a little, realizing he was hoping...

His apprentie-brother thumped his tail. "About as likely as if we flew through the air without wings or starships. She'll probably turn into an exceedingly clever apprentice, yes, but one with a bad attitude who'll throw tantrums, bite your guests, and tell you to clean your own dishes." Rahsaas took Haatha's plate and handed it to his Second, who trotted off to the kitchen area with it.

Haatha watched after her. "I *liked* cleaning the dishes," he said sheepishly. "It was fun to play in the water."

It was Rahsaas' turn to put his hands on his forehead. "Fine, fine. I'd decided to get a Fourth anyway. I'll pick a young one, and maybe she'll be able to socialize your wildling if we come visit."

Haatha looked at his apprentice-brother. "Would you?" he asked in relief. "Seriously, I can't lay a finger on the hatchling anymore, and maybe if it gets the idea I *don't* mean to hurt it..."

"We'll see. My Second and Third can watch over them, so your little wildling doesn't eat my socialized newbie."

Haatha thought about that, and winced.

It turned out that three of his apprentice brothers showed up: Rahsaas, Tassans, and Chath; and all their apprentices. Tassans still had a "mere" eight, Rahsaas had his three and a neuter who was still a few months away from gendering, while Chath had two apprentices and two young neuters, about a year older than the wildling runt.

Chath had arrived first, explaining that Rahsaas wanted some moral support, to make sure that his newbie didn't get picked on. Tassans arrived last, bearing two cages full of small prey-vermin and explaining that *he* wanted his Second and Third to see how hard it was to tame feral hatchlings.

Haatha just showed everyone else's Firsts and Seconds where he kept bedding, food, and bathroom supplies, and stood back while an army of apprentices started putting things in order. He was obscurely gratified when he realized Tassans'-Second slipped away at every opportunity to peek at the neuters in the apprentice run.

Haatha himself spent a lot of time sitting just beyond the lock-door, watching the quartet of neuters. Despite Rahsaas' predictions, the hissing, posturing, and squabbles had been mostly over in a few days -- partly, Haatha had to admit, because of Chath's two being a diversion. Rahsaas'-Fourth, being the eldest neuter, should have been the leader of the quartet, and certainly Chath's-Third and Chath's-Fourth agreed with this; the runt, however, seemed to think that it was in charge of all the little-hunts that happened in the apprentice-run. This meant some of the prey escaped for a while, before Rahsaas-Fourth and the gray runt worked out who was supposed to be in front.

On the fifth day after his apprentice-brothers' arrival, Chath found Haatha watching the sleeping apprentices through the run's observation window.

"Wore themselves out, did they?" asked his second apprentice-brother, settling himself into a chair, arms crossed over the front of it while his tail coiled between the chairlegs.

Haatha nodded. "Apparently. And the little terra-moush is still skittering around. I hope that Rahsaas is right, and off-world food won't make them sick when they finally eat it."

Chath snorted mildly. "He and I both agree that terra-rodents are fine as treats." He looked out fondly. "A sweet sight, eh?"

"Yes. Yours are really beautiful, you know. I didn't know iridescent green like that was possible. Rahsaas'-Fourth is pretty as well." He didn't comment on the contrast between the two green neuters, Rahsaas' amber-gold one, and the grayish runt.

"Yours has a nice build, though," Chath said. "Gawky until she genders, but she'll be a stunning Matriarch."

Haatha curled his lips. "That's disgusting, Chath."

His apprentice-brother thumped his tail. "There's been some speculation, you know, that you were an adult-fetishist."

He recoiled, nearly falling off his own chair. "What?! You can't be serious!"

Chath's tail shivered between the chairlegs. "Larsh was worried that you hadn't gotten an apprentice. He figured you were either frequenting brothels, or had some adult... 'understanding.'"

"I had my work to occupy me," Haatha said primly. "And the only adult in my life *that way* was Matriarch Chaas. Larsh has a dirty mind."

"Oh, quite," Chath agreed. "Well, then, say your little gray will be a lovely Matriarch for her apprentices. She'll start getting graceful from about the time she genders, till bio-adulthood."

"You're sure?" Haatha asked, wistful.

"I'm not a physiologist for nothing. Quite seriously, she'll be a temptation for you when she comes into her full growth."

"Chath, *you* have a dirty mind. Besides... I might not keep her. It."

His apprentice-brother tail-thumped some more. "Do you know, Matriarch Chaas said much that same thing for about a year, watching you play in that run. She thought she was getting too old for another apprentice. She wound up keeping you, of course."

Haatha thumped his own tail lightly against the floor. "But I was a quiet, well-behaved hatchling. This one... it's smart and aggressive and *loud*."

Chath stood up and backed off the chair, then went to Haatha's side. He crouched down and whispered, "But you'll never forgive yourself if you let her go. You'll never know what she made of herself..."

Haatha turned his head to eye the older Unar dubiously. Chath winked -- an appalling habit, picked up from some mammalian race or other -- and strode out of the room. His tailtip was *still* wriggling in amusement.

After a tenday, his apprentice-brothers packed up their hordes of apprentices and left, promising to return periodically for as long as "Haatha's Wildling" needed civilizing influences. The still-feral runt peered suspiciously from one of the dens as its packmates were called by their Patriarchs and apprentice-sisters. Haatha thought the hatchling looked betrayed again, watching as the other neuters scrambled and loped to their families.

It seemed very quiet in the house. Haatha hadn't quite gotten used to thirteen apprentices and three other adults -- not to mention the three extra neuters -- all in the same area. But he did sort of miss watching the younglings play.

"I wonder," he murmured, sitting in the 'lock and watching the hatchling look through the dens for its missing packmates. "Maybe I should get another apprentice. An older one, ready to gender. Help me take care of you."

The runt looked at him and hissed, obviously blaming him for the vanishment of the others.

"All right," he said. "And another hatchling, about your age. You could hunt with it. What do you say to that?"

The little gray marched up to within a meter of him, and stood up tall on its legs. It opened its mouth and hissed.

Haatha twitched his tail. "Two more hatchlings, maybe? For a proper chevron?"

It stared at him with glittering black eyes, then emitted a most indignant wail.

Haatha covered his ears and snarled back for a moment before stopping, horrified that he might have traumatized it.

The hatchling hopped backwards and watched him, then ran forwards a few tiny steps, to hiss. He hissed back. It came closer and snarled. He gave a long, drawn-out hiss. The runt marched up to barely an egg's length away and shrieked, showing all its teeth. Haatha winced a little, then blew in its face.

It stared at him in offended bewilderment, and Haatha stared back, trying to keep his tail from twitching. Quietly, he asked, "Do you want to be First, with no elder apprentice-sisters? Is that it?"

The runt cocked its head at him, then scolded him with incoherent chirps for several seconds, before running off to check the dens again. It flushed out one of the vermin-lizards that had escaped notice, and immediately lost interest in vanished packmates in the heat of the chase.

Haatha watched his hatchling playing for a while, with images making word-patterns in his head. He resolved to put his work-table by the apprentice-run's window. He could see the beginning of the poem, but he knew it would be years before he even glimpsed the end of it.

He stood, ignored by the runt, and curled his tail fondly. "You probably won't like poetry one little bit," he whispered, "but I can't wait to see what you choose for yourself, my First."

* * * *



Words on the Wing

ISSUE #11

Copyright 2000 Cynthia A Shettle

skyelf@mindspring.com

<http://www.fantasylibrary.com/office/shettle.htm>



More on Modular Systems

In a modular system, you can go to a new campaign world and understand how to choose skills, traits and attributes. However, which skills and traits are available vary based on what is appropriate to the world setting involved. Some traits that exist in multiple worlds may work differently or have interactions with other traits that only work in some worlds. For instance, T'Phon was a fantasy game and didn't allow Super Traits, so none of my T'Phon characters had them. In Perilous Earth, I built Zahirah with no Super Traits because she already had a number of supernatural abilities as a Djinn and was a powerful mage. Terrwyn had two Super Traits, one major and one minor because she had no spells or racial abilities. When I built Lyrin for the Harn run, I specifically chose Teleportation as her Psionic Trait because, as a Sindarian, she was allowed to purchase it for half the usual cost.

My T'Phon characters were all spellcasters because there were no other options in that world if I wanted nifty abilities. Trillhar had the three magical realms from T'Phon that I thought looked most interested because she was the first character I built in that world. Jocasta's primary realm was VarUna (the ocean) because that fit both her race of Argainian (natural amphibians) and her profession of Corsair. Terrwyn didn't have any spells at all because we decided that she would be a psionic instead of a mage. Zahirah's primary realm was Red Magic because that was the system of the Djinn. She dabbled in Grey Magic (the mortal realm) but didn't practice any of the other three because she was

forbidden from Green Magic and didn't want to choose sides between White and Black. Lyrin took four of the six magical convocations because, as a Sindarian, she was exempt from the local laws prohibiting those outside the mage's guild from learning more than three. However, her spell list was fairly short because each spell was a separate skill and, unlike the other Fantasy Realms worlds, she didn't get extra ones based on the realms she bought.

Fantasy Realms had the concept of professions which would give bonus ranks to any skill purchased from one of the skill categories associated with that profession. That encouraged characters to concentrate in skills in that area. For instance, Zahirah had mostly occult and scholarly skills because that was where her bonuses were. Terrwyn, as a stuntwoman, had a lot of athletic skills. Lyrin, while still using the profession rules, was the first character built under the Aspect system. Since that gave her six separate skill pools to buy skills with, she ended up not only more diversified than my other Fantasy Realms characters, but with a much longer skill list.

It's hard to find good examples of characters from different modules interacting. For one thing, in most cases, the non-native characters were actually old characters from previous campaigns converted from a different mechanic. I've seen D'Val in three different mechanics so



far and I don't think he originated in Oearth. Jack and Max were, likewise, converted characters when I met them. The second T'Phon party traveled to a shadow of Mystic Earth where they encountered that timeline's version of some of the NPCs from that campaign. They were accompanied by two characters who claimed to be from Fevrier, but were actually converted D&D characters. However, it is easier to convert a character into a modular system because that makes it possible to design new skills and traits or even an entire new magic system in order to cover abilities the local game world doesn't have available to natives.

The other problem I'm finding is that the modular mechanic makes the interactions too smooth. Not that smooth interactions are a bad thing; that's really the point in having



modular mechanics. However, it makes for less interesting storytelling. For instance, Terrwyn's telekinesis has the same effect on someone from Bradshaw's world who isn't allowed to buy Super Traits as it would on a mundane from her home world that simply chose not to take any. An alchemist from Bradshaw's world summoned a group of Naitor (a race of bat-like people from T'Phon) and gave them the Sonicist Super Trait. That was a logical extension of their racial abilities that worked very well, in spite of the fact that the Naitor were native to neither Bradshaw's world nor Perilous Earth and did not normally have Super Traits available to them. It didn't affect Starbuck or Lucy in the least that Lyrin only paid 10 points for her Teleportation when it would have cost a Perilous Earth character (or a human from her own world) 20 points. Nor did it matter to them that Harn called it a Psionic trait instead of a Super Trait. In any case, the only other teleporter they had met was D'Val and he used an entirely different method of teleporting.

There was the amusing bit where, in trying to learn the native language of the foreigners, Lyrin started by picking up Ancient Greek from Lucy. But that had more to do with Lucy's strange background and her lying to Lyrin about what languages she spoke than it did with the fact that Lyrin's spell didn't exist in any of the five realms of Perilous Earth magic. Starbuck did have to use the Harn fatigue rules when he cast spells there, instead of the feedback table he was used to. And, due to the different balancing mechanics of the two systems, he ended up being penalized twice for the difficulty of the spell, since his home system deducted it from the chance to cast and Harn deducted it from his Health when rolling for fatigue. However, the fact that Perilous Earth required fewer skills to be a mage than Harn did meant that his actual chance to cast was probably in roughly the same range as Lyrin's, in spite of the extra penalties to the roll. Lyrin ended up not being penalized for spell difficulty at all when she went back to Perilous Earth with Starbuck. However, I'm not sure she cast any spells in the short time she was there. She certainly had fewer spells

than any of the local characters and three of those were detect spells which only identified types of magic that didn't exist in Perilous.

Actually, I can think of some interesting interactions, but they involved the Magicians Universe. Since that was a free form system, I have trouble justifying it as a mechanic, but it was modular. The question of whether or not each universe represents a separate module is kind of fuzzy. After all, the waves and tentacle monsters pre-date most of the rules of how even human magic worked. However, the rainbow people definitely can be consider a separate module.

The genetic determination for magical capability worked entirely differently for the rainbow people than it did for every other system of magic we encountered in the multiverse. Even the determination of which spells were available to a character worked differently. Previously encountered systems could all be classified as high, medium, low or no variety systems. However, the rainbow people's magic system was, in many ways, twenty three separate low or no variety systems. But all twenty three systems used instincts that pointed in the same direction. For other systems within the multiverse, this would mean that anyone with instincts pointing in that direction could learn spells from any of the twenty three categories. The way the rainbow people's magic system worked, someone with the ability to time travel backwards had a better chance of learning the human magicians' method of transferring magical energy from one magician to another (a highly useful ability foreign to all twenty three types of rainbow people magic) than he did of figuring out the rainbow people's spells for time traveling forwards.

In actual play, the rainbow people and human magic systems were compatible. Both used the same type of magical energy with the same rules governing how quickly it recovered. Magical energy came in personalized colors, even if all of the original rainbow people and a good percentage of their descendants had multiple colors. This was an unusual default

for a magic system, but multiple colors weren't unheard of. In fact, one of the human magicians had six colors, more than all but two practitioners of the rainbow people's magic system encountered. And one of those was the long dead Rainbow Mother, one of the original rainbow people.

The interaction between the two started when Nara planar traveled into the universe Frederick was visiting at the time. He impressed her right away with his apparent ability to speak her language, the first person to do so since she had left home. Actually, he had a translation spell allowing him to speak and understand any language he encountered. Since Nara's system had no such spell, she had some trouble understanding how it worked. In particular, Frederick's spell would translate spoken words into the nearest equivalent in the listener's language. This caused some confusion, but it did have useful points. Nara misinterpreted one universe's King of the Half-Gods as being her own deity, the Rainbow Mother, since both were demigods of magic. However, they were very different deities in a lot of ways, especially since both were based on real people. Being brought to the temple of the King of the Half-Gods turned out to be very useful, even though he wasn't actually Nara's deity. The ghost tended to pay attention to his followers and took a great interest in Nara and Frederick, the first living, sentient magicians he had seen in thousands of years. He was quite friendly and helpful and ended up joining them in the rest of their travels, as well as introducing them to the other gods of his world, also the ghosts of long dead magicians.

Frederick's and Nara's methods of planar travel were quite different. Nara's system required an amount of magic proportional to the distance traveled, spent all at once. This limited her spell to traveling to neighboring worlds. The spell Frederick normally used could go anywhere he could figure out the location of with a flat energy cost, no matter where it was. This meant that he could visit universes extremely far away, but the energy cost was so prohibitive that he had to spread it across two weeks. However,

Frederick's system was one of the high variety ones and therefore extremely versatile. He was able to invent a spell which would allow him to utilize a gate someone else had created for a much reduced cost. That allowed him to follow Nara wherever she went, which he decided to do. Nara was young, inexperienced and currently unable to control her newfound ability to planar travel. Frederick wanted to help her. Though he couldn't teach her directly, he could make certain she survived long enough to get the practice she needed.

Their travels together were probably the most fun I've had in a single campaign. Unfortunately, they involved a lot of things difficult to duplicate in a system with mechanics. A one paragraph description could cover enough of a world to start playing in it. The details could come later, as they became relevant. Eventually, all things have to come to an end. Nara learned not only how to control when she activated her planar travel spell, but where she went as well. She and Frederick managed to find their way back to her home world.

The true natives of Nara's world (the rainbow people were immigrants and their descendants hybrids) had found a plant which produced a pollen that affected magicians like a drug. Those affected lacked the will to do anything on their own. The withdrawal symptoms were even worse, making the magicians allergic to their own magic. Even having the energy made them nauseous, while actual spellcasting made them violently ill. The government had decided to use this pollen drug to enslave the local magicians and force them to do the government's bidding.

Frederick and Nara had the misfortune to land in the middle of a government greenhouse where the plant was cultivated and were quickly drugged. However, the government wasn't prepared for Frederick whose instinctive reaction was to cast a Control spell on himself. The rainbow people's magic system contained mind control spells, but they only forced the target to follow one particular order given at the time of

casting. Frederick's spell was more versatile, allowing the caster to give the target as many orders as desired and lasting until dispelled. This meant that, if Frederick gave himself an order, he then had to obey it, *no matter how much of the drug they gave him*. Because of this, he was able to plan and execute an escape, in spite of the drug. Unfortunately, going through withdrawal preventing him from casting the spells that would allow him to leave the universe and return home. That meant that he, reluctantly, had to remain addicted for over two weeks.

While Frederick was going through withdrawal, the rest of the Magicians Council decided that they had to help Nara's people. There was much debate over who exactly was going to go with Frederick, as they were limited by the number of passengers he could carry at one time. Once things got decided, they made two trips to the King of the Half-God's world, which conveniently neighbored Nara's world. Since Nara could carry herself and her familiar, everyone could make the last step together. (The familiars were small, furry animals whose magic system was limited to creating permanent links and donating their magical energy to whomever they were bonded to.)

The war in Nara's universe was quite interesting in a lot of ways and not quite like any other war. For one thing, neither side really wanted to kill the other. Frederick ended up as the general of the magicians' side, being both Council Head and the only member of their group with any kind of combat experience. Since he had a code against killing, and none of the other magicians or friendly locals were exceptionally violent, they did their best not to kill their opponents. The general of the other army was under orders from the government to drug and capture all of the magicians, including the strange foreign ones, which they attempted to accomplish by shooting them with dart-like needles filled with the drug in a liquid solution.

However, some people were using real weapons and it was inevitable that injuries

would occur. At first, there were healers on both sides, but the magicians' goal was to rescue the drugged and enslaved magicians working for the other side. Some time after they had monopolized the healing magic, Frederick approached the opposing general under a flag of truce. He wished to send some of his people over to heal those members of the other army who were in danger of dying. In return, he wanted the general's agreement to not attack or drug any of his people while the healers were in his camp and for the length of time required to recover energy equivalent to what was spent doing the healing. The other general eventually agreed on the condition that, in addition to saving as many lives as possible, he would be allowed to use the healers on some of the less injured people.

But the key moment in that scene was when Frederick (who had been readdicted during one of the battles) suddenly realized that his last dose was about to wear off and he hadn't brought any of the drug with him. Aware that the opposing army had plenty to spare, Frederick asked for some. Not knowing about the Control spell, the general was quite surprised to discover that Frederick was addicted, but still able to function normally. What really impressed him though was Frederick's restraint in taking only the minimal amount needed to avoid withdrawal when the underling sent to fetch the drug misunderstood the general's intent and brought way too much of it. This was the beginning of the general's realization that magicians were people too.

Before Frederick was readdicted, he kept what their side had of the drug in his magic box which only he could open. The human magicians had decided to try to get the rescued locals off of the drug as soon as possible. Delhia had a spell which could cure them permanently (or, at least until they got another dose) but it was very expensive, so she could only cast it one person every day or two. Unfortunately, many of the magicians were psychologically addicted to the drug which her spell didn't cure.

One of them had the ability to dispel

magic which he threatened to use on Frederick's box. While he didn't actually carry through with his threat, Frederick was quite shocked to realize that the kid had the capability to do so. In Frederick's magic system, counterspells had to be specifically designed for whatever they were countering and there wasn't one for his box. Once he recovered, Frederick explained to the kid that dispelling his box wouldn't just unlock it, but also cancel the enchantment allowing the box to be bigger inside than out. This would leave the contents on the ethereal plane, inaccessible to the kid trying to get a hold of the drug inside.

Of course, the double standard in allowing Frederick to remain addicted wasn't popular with the rescued locals. However, Delhia's spell wouldn't work on a more powerful magician, which Frederick was. (Though she eventually researched a variant that would.) It only took one battle without Frederick's leadership for Delhia and Michael to decide that they couldn't run the army without him.

For one of their plans, the local army pulled out their magicians who could mentally travel back in time. After their nighttime raid failed, they would give one of these magicians instructions on what they did wrong and send him back so they could try again. The idea was that they would keep trying different things until they got it right. But they weren't counting on Delhia. She had, until meeting Nara, believed that time travel was impossible. However, she did have a spell that told her what time it was and, as a side effect, detected the ripples caused by the time travel spell. After enough repetitions, she was able to figure out what was going on and managed to send a message to herself while Nara activated her own time travel ability. The two of them were able to explain what was happening to the others and they were able to rescue the magicians being used to do the time travel, thus ending the loop.

We never actually finished that scenario. The politics of peace negotiations were less interesting than the action of the war.

Also, the high priests of the various local deities wanted to go on a quest to talk to their gods and we hadn't figured out enough of their religious system to pull this off. One thing we had figured out was that the locals believed that magicians didn't have souls. Edward and Carl had been mistaken for priests because Carl was a ghost linked to Edward and they were the human magicians' experts on the afterlife. This meant that they were allowed into the meetings of the high priests and they tried to convince the other priests that the magicians had been forgiven and now had souls. (They decided it was easier than

convincing them of the truth, which was that magicians had always had souls.) The reason for the quest was to ask the gods if this was true. The magicians actually did have the capability to pull it off, since they had help from the ghosts of the Rainbow Mother and several other real people that the local gods were based on. Plus they had deities from the nearby universe willing to impersonate the nearest equivalent in the local religion. We did decide that they would be successful in their quest and would eventually get things worked out, but we didn't roleplay it.

Legacy 2000

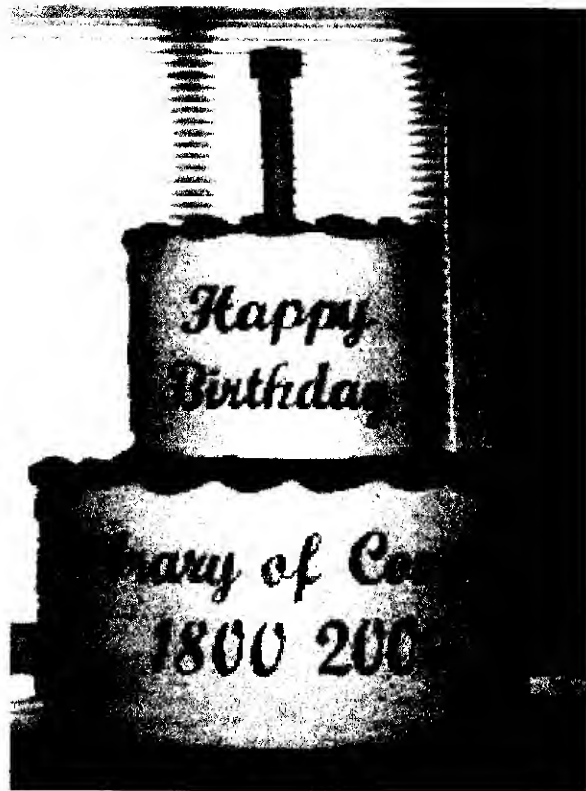
Wednesday

The convention didn't begin until Friday, but I flew to DC early to see my family. My father met me at the airport then we picked up my mother at her office and spent the rest of the afternoon together. We met my sister and her husband for dinner, so I got to see them again for the first time since their wedding close to two years ago.

Thursday

Before the convention, I did some sight-seeing with my parents. Taking the Metro to the Library of Congress, we encountered Elaine, a PWFC member also from the New England region. Since she was heading to the Library of Congress too, we walked there together, though she was meeting a friend and seeing a different part, so we split up when we arrived. There was a long line to go through security before entering the library. The Wizard of Oz exhibit was nice, but not spectacular. Likewise, the fancy architecture and painted ceilings were worth seeing, but probably not worth standing in line for.

The next stop was Dali's Optical Illusions at the Hirshhorn Museum. Overall, I liked the exhibit but, I must admit, I had trouble seeing all the illusions I was supposed to. We rested in the sculpture garden afterwards. They had some interesting sculptures, though only my dad walked around



to see all of them. I did some birdwatching by the fountain. We had dinner with Andy and Kevin again, this time at a restaurant a couple blocks from the Omni Shoreham Hotel.

After dinner, I walked over and registered for the convention then returned to the hotel where I was staying that night. Vicki and the others had already arrived, but hadn't

eaten yet and wanted to register, so we went back to the Omni Shoreham. The registration line was shorter then, but my earlier trip wasn't a complete waste because I had figured out the Metro ride and could now play "native guide," making sure we got on the trains going the right direction and knew which stop to get off at.

Friday

The six of us packed up and took cabs to the Omni Shoreham with half of us getting to ride in one from the Highland Cab Ass'n. We had reserved a block of rooms, so the Omni had already assigned us specific room numbers and those rooms were still occupied, even though they had others available. We checked our luggage at the desk and went to the zoo to meet the other PWFC members who had arrived early. It was an animal friendly zoo with recreations of natural habitats for as many animals as possible. This was nice in some ways, but it also meant that the animals had lots of places to hide from the mid-day sun (and incidentally, the tourists) so we didn't get to see all of them. Linda wore a hat with lots of horns, each one a different color. The group got separated. I eventually ended up alone and talking to a zoo employee outside one of the exhibits. He didn't recognize the PWFC symbol on my shirt but, when I mentioned Linda's hat, he knew right away who I was talking about and told me which direction she was headed.

Back at the hotel, we found fire trucks waiting outside. Apparently, the convention before us had spilled Freon in what was going to be the dealers room and they had to clean it out. That didn't sound like a promising start to the convention. One of our three rooms was ready now, so we checked into it and brought all the luggage up. The strap had broken off my luggage on one end. I complained about it to the bellhop who said he'd report it and have someone come up and fix it.

I sat with Josepha Sherman at the opening bash, a concert by a bagpipe group called the Rogues. During intermission, I ran up to my room to get the tape that I had

promised her at Arisia. Some people were dancing to the bagpipe music, including a belly dancer. The person dressed like Bronze Age Methos danced with the woman dressed as Xena, which we found amusing though, technically, they could have been contemporaries.

Donna and Gillian came out to tell us about An Evening at Joe's, the collection of Highlander short stories written by people associated with the show. They read the beginning of their joint story, "Postcards from Alexa," describing Adam and Alexa's travels from both points of view. Both have other stories in the book as well. F Braun McAsh read an excerpt from his story about Hans Kershner (the character he played in "The Modern Prometheus") and Vlad the Impaler (who is an Immortal, not a vampire, in the Highlander universe). Ginjer Buchanan read an excerpt from an Amanda story written by someone not attending the convention.

Saturday

"Script to Screen," Donna and Gillian's panel on the process of turning a script into an episode was the first one of the day. I'd heard them at previous conventions, but they add new bits to the parts they reuse, so it's interesting to hear again. They ran over, so I was late to the panel on media tie-in books in the other room which Josepha and Ginjer had already started. Donna was, naturally, late as well and had forgotten to bring a copy of Zealot, which the other panelists told her she needed. When Donna turned to the audience to borrow a copy, I pulled out mine, which I said she could keep in front of her during the panel if she autographed it. She signed it, "Thanks for rescuing me!"

I snuck out slightly before the end because I had a low number for Peter's autograph line and I didn't want to not be there when they called me. It turned out to not be necessary because, while they were being strict about only allowing autograph tickets numbered one through fifty into the line, they weren't keeping them in order. Since Jim Byrnes was doing autographs at the time, they

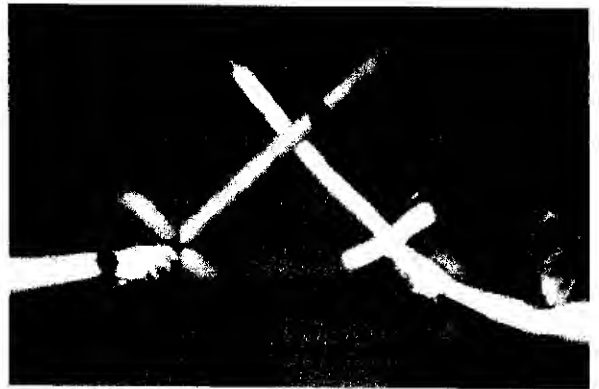
allowed people with low numbers for Peter to get Jim's autograph at the same time, though people with low numbers for Jim couldn't get Peter's. I had Peter sign the first Watchers Chronicle CD with Adam Picerson's name and I later got Donna to autograph it as well, so I now have Adam's CD signed by both the real and fictional authors.

They had Q&A's in the afternoon, though getting Peter's autograph made me late for Elizabeth and Stan's. They also showed us the teaser from the upcoming Highlander movie. I got up during the movie Q&A and asked how much screen time Peter and Jim got in the movie since I'd rather see them than Adrian and Christopher. Later, after it had turned into Peter and Jim's Q&A, I asked about Jim's appearance in Cold Squad. Neither of the answers were very enlightening, however. Someone asked Peter about his upcoming appearance in Stargate. He said something about his character being possessed by a snake or something. Peter wasn't certain exactly what was going on since he wasn't familiar with the show and I know less about Stargate than he does, which didn't help me figure it out.

After the Q&A's were over, I returned to the dealers room for Donna and Gillian's autograph session. I had Donna sign both Watcher CD's since she wrote them both. Since I didn't have anything else for Gillian to autograph, I had them both autograph the program for me. Their session wasn't popular enough to enforce the one autograph per person rule. Elizabeth Gracen's autograph session was still going on. I had too high a number to get an autograph, but I stuck around and managed to talk to her for a bit afterwards, which was what I really wanted anyway.

The charity auction got off to a slow start because they had a professional auctioneer. Jim Byrnes got on stage, but the auctioneer didn't let him do anything. Elizabeth Gracen was more fun. She still didn't do any auctioning, but she did stuff like model a jacket in the background. They had a Cabbage Patch doll made to look like Duncan.

Elizabeth put on lipstick and kissed the doll on both cheeks, then declaring the doll to be Duncan after a night with Amanda. When Stan Kirsh got on stage, he took over the auctioning. Even though he protested greatly, Stan was convinced to let Elizabeth put lipstick on him, so he could kiss a pillow that was to be auctioned off. Peter took his turn. He auctioned off, among other things, a Bronze Age Methos Cabbage Patch doll and a copy of The Captive Soul. Josepha Sherman joined him on stage. Both put on Josepha's lipstick to kiss the inside cover of the book and both promised to autograph it for whomever bought it. There were the usual requests to take off shirts. Peter got around this by putting on the T-shirt he was going to model under the shirt he was already wearing. Then, since that was the last item he was auctioning, he went behind the screen with the person who had bought the shirt, so that she was the only one who could see him take it off again.



At the PWFC party, we blew bubbles and played with balloons. Some of the balloons were shaped like short rods which were used to hit the normal shaped balloons back and forth. Other balloons were made into swords, which we used to have a sword fight. Since balloons aren't meant for such rough treatment, the swords popped, so that didn't last long. The Wingfield fork was passed on from one Lisa to another with a bit of a ceremony. Peter had been invited to the party, but couldn't make it. His autograph session ran late and whomever was delivering his dinner took forever.

Jim Byrnes and his band gave a concert on Saturday night. I went and sat in the hall and did some writing. The music was still pretty loud there. Someone passed by during intermission and stopped to chat about why I was called Sky Elf. He had seen Peter inside the room and thought that, since I was a PWFC member, I ought to be inside where Peter was. He gave me a ticket, so I decided to try going inside. Peter was with the other guests in a corner that had been roped off, so the fans couldn't bother them. Inside the room, the music was loud enough to make my ears hurt, so I wasn't particularly inspired to buy a ticket at future conventions.

Sunday

After a fan panel and video, they had a Methos panel. Peter, Donna and Gillian talked about the behind the scenes evolution of Methos as a character, including how Peter's interpretation of the scripts influenced future scripts. F Braun McAsh was there to discuss the choreography of Methos' sword fights. While Josepha was there to discuss her novel, she didn't get to say much. Her book was influenced by the series, especially when "Comes a Horsemen" aired while she was writing it and she had to contact TPTB to find out when the flashback in the episode took place relative to the one in her book. However, her book didn't influence the series at all. This was the first convention Peter was at since the birth of his son, so they gave him a large card signed by the convention attendees. Peter had to leave after lunch to return to Spain where he's filming Queen of Swords. Stan, Elizabeth, Jim Byrnes and James Horan did an afternoon Q&A. They stopped taking questions early so Stan and Jim could read excerpts from their stories. Stan's story was a collection of letters written by Richie from the afterlife. The two he read were the ones to Amanda and Joe, which I thought was very appropriate since Elizabeth and Jim were there for him to read to.

Donna and Gillian had a new panel where the audience gets to plot an episode. My first thought was that it was going to be like the Arisia panel where the audience plots a

novel, but there are a lot of differences. First we randomly determined which season and episode we were going to be doing. This generated the slot "Free Fall" is in which, being the first episode filmed, was deemed to be too complicated. Rerolling, we got one of the sixth season "try-out girl" episodes. That meant that we had to include a strong female Immortal who could potentially get her own show if USA liked her. We had Adrian Paul for the entire episode, so Duncan had to have a strong showing as well. Since the recurring characters weren't contracted for this episode, we couldn't use any of them.

There were a lot of other considerations writing a television script that don't come up in a novel. We wanted several flashbacks in multiple time periods. Normally this would cause problems, but they all took place in the same convent and Catholic school that many of the present day scenes did, meaning that we could reuse the set and most of the costumes. When working on character background and plotting, we had to worry about what the producers would think and what USA was looking for, as well as avoiding including anything that might get the episode banned in the Bible Belt.

We didn't have nearly enough time to figure out the entire episode. F Braun McAsh and Bob came on stage to choreograph the fight scene at the end. Bob refused to play the female character, but there was an audience member who had taken the sword fighting classes and was good enough to do the part. F Braun McAsh played the villain and Bob played MacLeod. According to the script we had written, MacLeod fought the villain and lost, then the female Immortal stepped in with the legendary sword the villain was looking for. He knocked out MacLeod, fought her and lost. That meant that Bob just had to lie there on the floor while Braun and Morgan figured out the rest of the fight and he kept asking if he could get up yet. Overall, the panel was a lot of fun and I hope they do it again at future conventions.

After dinner, they had the Legacy game

show. The people running the convention had gotten permission to model it after a well known game show, but not to use the name of the show or phase the answers in the form of a question. The contestants were F



Braun McAsh, Donna Lettow and Ginjer Buchanan. The winner of the Highlander trivia contest got to judge, which meant she sat on stage next to a stack of reference books. Her services turned out not to be necessary because the only objection anyone had was to part of one of the questions, not the validity of the answer. They had gone to a lot of work to get electronic buzzers that would light up for the first contestant to hit the button. However, only the three contestants and the person sitting next to them could tell who that was. The board had to be done by hand and they convinced Bob to turn over the pieces of paper as the questions were picked. He seemed to enjoy himself, waving his sword around and threatening the board with it. After removing a page no longer needed, he would toss it either into the audience or somewhere on the stage. A copy of the questions was also displayed on a view screen for the audience. Between rounds, while the board was being set up again, Bob took the discarded pages from the previous round and let audience members pick them off his sword.

All the questions or answers related to Highlander in one form or another, though some were kind of a stretch. My favorite category was "Stupid Highlander Trivia" which included questions such as "Which Immortal goes around introducing himself as Duncan MacLeod of the Clan MacLeod?" I felt kind of sorry for Ginjer since there were a couple of categories that obviously gave Donna or Braun an edge, such as "Writer, Writer" which concerned scriptwriter terminology and "En Garde" about sword fighting. However, given that the game was stacked against her, Ginjer actually did fairly well. The three

rounds were named "The Gathering," "Double Jeopardy" and "Finale" after episodes. I can't believe that neither Donna nor Ginjer knew the answer to the "Finale" question - "What metal besides copper is used to make bronze?" If either of them had gotten it right, they could have won since Braun didn't wager very many points on his answer. Everyone in the audience that I talked to knew the answer.

After the game, James Horan did his cabaret act. He was really good, as usual. We called for an encore, and he obliged us, even though he wasn't prepared and therefore didn't have any more pre-recorded music to sing to. Josepha Sherman told us some ghost stories from folklore. Afterwards, I asked her to autograph a couple of her novels. She wanted something to drink, but the hotel bar was closed. A couple of other people from our group were outside the bar and we invited Josepha up to our con suite since we had beer there. We sat and chatted for a while. After Josepha left, Vicki told us that Linda was stepping down as president of the PWFC. Vicki was going to be the new president, which they had told Peter when he stopped by the club table before going to the airport that afternoon.

Monday

I was running late to the showing of rare footage when I heard a voice behind me say, "They can't start without me. I have the tapes." Turning, I saw Donna who realized, "Maybe I shouldn't have said that." However, we reassured her that we'd rather see them now, on the big screen anyway. They had some dailies and the auditions for Kronos and Richie. Except, in Stan's audition, people were calling him "Sammy," he was calling MacLeod, "Connor" and they were reading from the "Free Fall" script.

Braun and Gillian did a panel called "The Pen versus the Sword," regarding the fight scenes of Highlander. They talked about things like how, since filming time and screen time were estimated based on the number of script pages, a long fight needed to fill up a lot of paper without saying much about the actual

fight because the choreography was the swordmaster's job. Gillian said that it was nice to work with a swordmaster who was also an actor because Braun would read the rest of the script. That way he would make the fighting style match the personality and mood shown by the rest of the episode. And Braun said how much he liked working with an actor who was also a swordmaster when he had Anthony DeLongis on the show. They showed some more film clips as well, including from "Duende" where Tony and Adrian had to film the Spanish circle fighting in the rain.

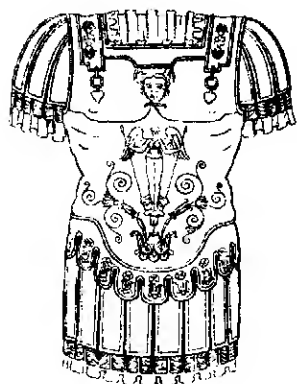
Tuesday

Vicki, Frances, Beverly and Stephanie were all staying longer to do some sight seeing. I had a flight back home in the afternoon, so we all went to the Viking exhibit at the Museum of Natural History in the morning. There was some extra time, so we also looked at the birds of Washington DC exhibit. I brought my bags with me and put them in locker at the museum until after lunch when I left for the airport.

Color photos from my trip can be viewed at:
<http://www.fantasylibrary.com/office/cindy/leg00mi.htm>

Shattered Light

Shattered Light by Simon & Schuster Interactive allows you to build a character from one of eight character classes. There are four mage classes, one for each of the four types of magic in the game. There are also four non-mage classes, each of which is also paired up with one of the types of magic. While all characters automatically start with a few spells, which is nice, it is difficult to gain many more spells in play, which can be frustrating. Paladins only start with one empty spell slot and the various mages with two each. Other characters have no empty slots at start. Out of 3 points per level of advancement, you must spend 5-7 per spell slot as a mage or 15-30 as a non-mage. Also, there is no way to tell what a spell does until after you have learned it. That means that, if you somehow manage to



survive in spite of dedicating all your points to learning a new spell for five to ten levels, you may discover that the spell you have learned isn't very useful. You do start with 12 points to distribute, allowing you to customize your character, but

putting all your starting points into spells would make you too wimpy in other areas. You may put points into skills, but the stats seem more effective, since they don't tie you to a particular weapon or type of monster.

The other problem with characters is equipment. Mages are barred from too many weapons and too much armor to be really effective when they run out of magical energy. While mana does recover at a fairly decent rate, it is not infinite. However, for those characters who can use it, what they did with equipment is interesting. Instead of giving a flat bonus to one or more stats, each item modifies those stats it affects by a percentage of the value of the stat. This means that a high stat will benefit more from being magically enhanced than a low stat. Since all fractions are dropped, a sufficiently low stat will not benefit at all.

All weapons, even non-magical ones, increase Strength. One of the quirks of the game is that you can benefit from both a ranged and a hand weapon at the same time, even though you appear to only be able to wield one at a time. The weapon you use in combat is usually the more recent one of the two you are carrying. All armor helps Defense. You can benefit from a shield even if wielding

a two handed weapon. Be careful outfitting a starting character. The cheapest weapons and armor don't have enough of a bonus to increase low starting stats. Heavier weapons and armor have Strength and Dexterity minimums, but the only way you can find out what they are is to try to use an item you don't have the stats for. Items forbidden to your class will be shaded light gray, so they can be identified. If you join a House, they will gift you with enough money to purchase one or two expensive, possibly even magical, items. Also, if you enter your Household or Guild Hall, you will usually find a couple of items, or at least some gold, somewhere in the building.

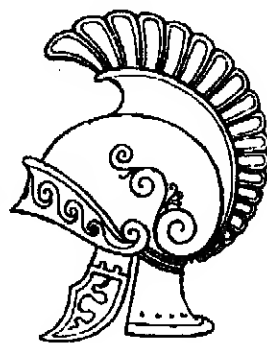
Every time you exit the game and restart, more items will appear in each Household and Guild Hall. While it is possible to exit and return over and over again just to get more free stuff, there is a limit to how much this can benefit you. You can only wear one of each type of item. Even rings are right or left handed. Unfortunately, the only way to know which hand is to try to put it on. Items may be sold, but only for a small fraction of their actual value and money doesn't seem to be used for anything except to buy equipment which is unlikely to be much better than you already have if you've been playing for any length of time. Having a full set of spares (or as close as you can manage) is useful, in case you get killed, but too much extra gear prevents you from picking up nifty items you find while adventuring. Note that there is nothing preventing you from carrying items in your backpack that you cannot use, even if it is because of stat limitations. So a character too weak to wield a bastard sword could carry ten of them around in his pack.

Restarting the game will also send you back to the town square. While you can use your Set Teleport spell to memorize your current location, you may only have one location memorized other than the town square. Also, the Teleport spell will not prevent you from appearing in front of a group of monsters, so it can be dangerous to teleport into the wilderness. Monsters get reset, not only when you leave the game but after a

certain amount of time passes. This means that you can never clear out safe areas of the map.

If the game tells you that an item cannot be used by your class, don't try to use it. Usually, it will just repeat that the item is forbidden. However, when I tried wearing a robe as a mentor, it let me put it on, but when I exited the game and reentered, it removed the robe and placed it in my slot for gold, which permanently prevented that character from carrying any gold. (Robes are body armor and therefore forbidden to the four mage classes.)

There are some problems with the graphics. The monsters have the ability to pick up treasures and move them around. Sometimes they leave an after image of the treasure where it used to be. A more serious problem is that the game will sometimes turn your character or one of the monsters he is fighting invisible. If this happens, move your character and he should reappear. It is generally a good idea to have your character window open while engaging in combat. Besides the fact that it lets you track your current Body and Mana points, the graphics do not always update promptly when the character window is closed. Another thing to be careful of is that you cannot see through walls. If your character is standing behind one, fighting something, you won't be able to tell



what's going on. I've also found a couple of caves and dungeons that crash the game when you enter them. And there's one that brings you to the dungeon, but leaves your character in limbo, so you can't actually do anything there except exit the game.

However, there are a couple of bugs that work in the player's favor. I've found three spells (all starting spells for at least one character class) which allow you to magically increase one of your stats. While each casting is only worth 1 or 2 points, there is no limit to

the number of times you may cast the spell and it doesn't wear off until you exit the game. Therefore, someone with enough patience and one of these spells can increase that stat indefinitely. The game magically enforces peace in the areas of the city. While the purpose of this is for multi-player games, it also works in solo play. This peace prevents physical attacks, but not spellcasting, including damage causing spells. Outside one of the city walls, but still on the same section of the map, there are a couple of nasty looking monsters. However, the magically enforced peace prevents their attacks from doing any damage while you slowly whittle them down with your damage spells.

Another thing about spells - be careful about what you have active and where you point the cursor. The game will allow you to cast healing and other beneficial spells on the monsters or to cast damage causing spells on yourself. If the maximum damage of your damage spell exceeds your current Body Points, it's even possible to kill yourself with it.

If you do die, your stuff gets dropped at your current location and you get teleported back to the starting screen, fully healed by the magic that brought you there. While there is a screen that you can call up that (theoretically) allows you to turn off the setting that makes characters drop everything at death, you cannot save the changes to that screen. Your stuff will remain where you left it until you quit the game. That means that, if you remember where that was (not guaranteed if you were exploring the wilderness) you can go back and get it. However, whatever it was that killed you will still be in the vicinity, so be sure to bring plenty of healing potions and put on all of your backup equipment before you go. If you pick up enough of your primary equipment while fighting off the monsters, you may be able to make another attempt if you get killed again.

The object of the game is supposed to be to go on various quests. Most of these quests are of the nature to go somewhere, get

something and bring it back to a person other than the one who gave you the quest. A few are along the lines of go somewhere, solve a mystery and have the guilty party arrested. The real problem with the quests is that of figuring out where you're supposed to go. If there are other villages, besides the city you start in, I haven't found them. I've found lots of plains, but none of them have any name that I can tell. Also, you can only be on one quest at a time, so you can't accept all of them in case you stumble across the right part of the map, but don't recognize it. One of the items you can find as treasure are keys of different colors. I presume you wouldn't be able to find them if they didn't have a purpose, but I've yet to figure out what it's supposed to be.

I've noticed multiple NPCs with the same name, which can confuse things since the quests seem all name based. Another quirk of the game is that some of the people you run into are out in the wilderness. All wilderness sections of the map have monsters of one kind or another, but they ignore NPCs entirely. Also, your attacks and spells will never hit NPCs, either intentionally or on purpose.

If you draw a map, you will see that the wilderness tiles appear to, for the most part, be arranged in a logical order, so if you go west and then north, you get to the same point as if you had gone north and then west. However, there are a few places where you can go somewhere, but not get back. It is possible to walk completely around the city so, if you leave by a one-way exit, you can get back in without teleporting. The one-way passages in the wilderness seem to be set up similarly, that they work logically in other directions, so you can eventually get back. If you do get lost, you can always teleport back to either the starting square or whichever local you've chosen to memorize. Don't try to teleport during combat, however. The monsters can still attack you while you are teleporting and you may crash the game in the process.

Overall, the game has a number of good points and it can be fun to play for a while. However, there's no good way of determining

which parts of the map are safe to go to at your level and dying can be frustrating. Which quests are available is dependant on your level, but that doesn't help unless you can match the

quests up with map locations. Also, unless you can figure out how to find the quests, the game is just hack and slash, which can get monotonous.

Comments on Issue #38

The Real McCoy

I liked your story, thought the neuter pronouns take some getting used to. While the ending does make it seem a bit like the first chapter of a novel, the story does work as a stand-alone as well.

The Sign of the Dancing Priestess

I currently have no plans to bring Ransley back. Quite likely, in spite of Methos' paranoia, he'll stay dead. Mortals can't become Immortal by killing Immortals. In my view of the universe, they can absorb some of the energy and use it to cling to life for remarkable lengths of time, long enough to get medical attention. (It was specifically stated within an episode that Horton did receive medical attention after his first "fatal" injury.) It might also help someone trying to revive them after a heart attack or if they stopped breathing - "deaths" that normal people sometimes recover from. (Assuming it couldn't prevent such from happening in the first place.)

At one point, I was considering writing a Horton story set shortly after his third supposed death in the series in which he is back on his feet after receiving medical attention in time, yet again and Methos is hunting him down. Joe would show up in the story, but would have to be a minor role and Duncan couldn't appear at all because this story would take place in second season, before they found out Adam was Methos. If this story happened in Ransley's timeline, then Horton died at the end of the story. If it didn't happen, then Horton stayed dead after his third "death" within the series, as TPTB have stated. In either case, Horton died well over a year before "Tangled Webs" takes place. That means that a team-up would have to be set in the past,

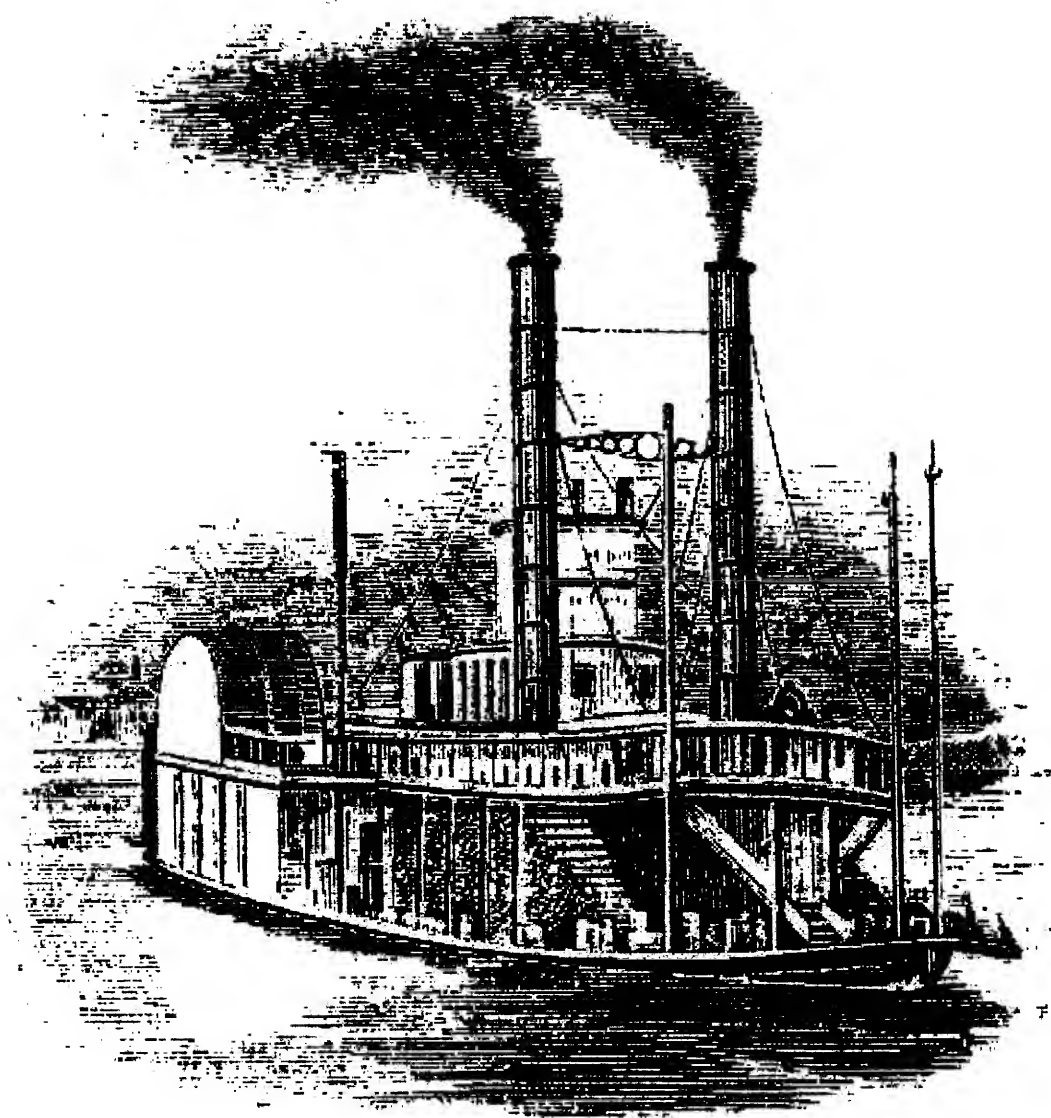
before they "returned to life." Also, I think Horton is aware that "narrowly saved from the brink of death" would be a more accurate description of what happened and does not believe that this is in any way connected to his killing Immortals.

The Swashbuckling Mage Rides Again

In your list of Champions modifications, you left out one of my favorites: the 10 point Special Effects power. This ability would enable the character possessing it to perform any minor effect associated with their overall power theme. For instance, Shamrock bought it with her teleportation. This allowed her to summon ordinary mundane items that she could justify knowing the location of. So she was never without pen and paper handy and could conjure a can of whipped cream to spray on the villain or a six pack of soda to pour in his computer. Since none of these things would have enough use to cost any points if she carried them around with her all the time, it seemed kind of silly to spend dozens of points buying the ability to summon them, especially since they were disposable items and would require reusable memorization slots.

I never tried playing Call to Power online, so I didn't run into the problems you had when doing so. I'll agree that the computer usually starts at least one other civilization near you, but it does not always hem you in from all sides. I'll admit that I had no room for expansion except by conquest in my second game, but I was asking for it by setting world size to minimum and the number of civilizations to maximum. In my other games, however, I've found plenty of room to grow. And, if I'm persistent enough, I can explore most of the map.

Get On Board For New Adventures!



www.fantasylibrary.com